Summary report

Autumn Accountability Session with Thames Water

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

Accountability Session | Wednesday 4th November 2026
Report published: **Friday 13th November**

Community members questioned Thames Water about water quality monitoring, leakage and the reliability of local supplies. They wanted clearer evidence of progress, explanations of investment decisions and practical improvements they could recognise in their own areas.

The Action Plan Review focused on continuous water quality monitoring: the scale of the rollout, interim milestones and how findings lead to action. The Performance Review explored leakage, permanent repairs and support during interruptions, including what measurable improvement members could expect over the next 12 months.

The Q&A section covered financial stability, learning from better-performing companies and rebuilding trust. The key discussion points, company responses and community requests are outlined on the following pages.

Action Plan Review
Q1: Make monitoring progress and results clearer

Community members wanted clarity on monitoring locations, delivery progress and how findings would inform us about water quality across all watercourses.

Thames Water reported 51 of 314 monitors installed against its March 2030 target. Members requested clearer costs, a map, interim milestones and explanations of findings and resulting action.

Performance Review
Q2: Reduce repeated leaks and improve supply reliability

Community members wanted lasting leak repairs, more reliable supplies and better support during supply interruptions.

Thames Water outlined increased repairs, new leak detection technology and mains replacement. Members sought clearer local priorities and performance comparisons; measurable 12 month improvements remained unconfirmed.

Q&A Q3:
Explain the financial position directly

Members wanted clear financial updates direct from Thames Water, including what changes could mean for services and investment.

Thames Water outlined its proposed financial restructuring and confirmed services would continue. Members requested accessible updates, clearer website content and better signposting.

Q&A Q4:
Make customer problems easier to resolve

Members asked what Thames Water was learning from better-performing companies.

The company described staff training, case ownership pilots with an 18 month rollout and its 2055 vision for long-term resilience.

Q&A Q5:
Rebuild trust through delivery and engagement

Members wanted visible improvements, honest performance updates and a say in communications

Thames Water outlined plans to explain local investment; members also suggested a practical guide to help new and existing households understand how to work with Thames Water.

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 Thames Water Accountability Session held on 4th November 2026. The actions outlined reflect the improvements community members would like Thames Water to make. These are community-led requests and do not represent confirmed commitments from the company at this stage. Thames Water will create a formal action plan by Monday 14th December 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.

Action Plan Review

Strengthening the company's existing actions

Q1. Building on Action 9, what interim milestones will you commit to between now and 2030 and what will you commit to reporting so customers can see both the progress of the rollout and what action is being taken in response to the monitoring findings?

Context from the session:

Community members wanted monitoring information that showed the programme's scale and practical value. Thames Water reported 51 monitors installed towards 314 by March 2030, describing the planned 314 monitors as representing coverage of 25% of storm overflow and treated discharges.

Members welcomed concrete figures but wanted clearer costs, priorities and delivery milestones. They also questioned what detected changes meant and how monitoring would lead to improvements. Thames Water explained that local conditions affect interpretation, that the Environment Agency helps determine locations and that land access and installation requirements complicate scheduling.

Existing activity context:

TH09[1], which is currently in progress, already covers phased installation and updates on further sites. Existing actions also describe additional locations and work with Catchment Partnerships to interpret data. Members sought clearer public explanations and evidence of the response to findings. TH07[2] concerns publication of drinking water results and is a separate commitment.

New actions requested by community members:

1A. Explain the scale, priorities and cost of the monitoring programme

Provide a clear explanation of what the programme covers and how investment decisions are made.

- Scale: Explain how the number of monitors relates to the 25% coverage target.
- Priorities: Explain how locations are selected, what environmental sensitivity means and who influences these decisions.
- Costs: Distinguish installation costs from ongoing maintenance and explain the main factors affecting expenditure.

1B. Show what monitoring finds and what action follows

Explain monitoring findings in plain language and how they inform improvements to water quality across all watercourses.

- Findings: Explain what changes in readings mean, including whether they indicate a harmful effect and how likely causes are identified.
- Action: Explain what operational changes or investment follow, and report what subsequent monitoring shows.

Keep waterway water quality monitoring clearly distinguished from drinking-water quality.

Actions requested continued overleaf...

[1] Thames Water, Action 9: *Continue phased installation of Continuous Water Quality Monitors upstream and downstream of assets, covering around 25% by 2030, and publish updates on further installation sites.*

[2] Thames Water, Action 7: *Review whether water quality results can be updated more frequently, such as through biannual summaries, and confirm the future publication frequency at the next accountability session.*

Action Plan Review

Strengthening the company's existing actions

Q1. Building on Action 9, what interim milestones will you commit to between now and 2030 and what will you commit to reporting so customers can see both the progress of the rollout and what action is being taken in response to the monitoring findings?

New actions requested by community members:

1C. Show where monitors are being installed and when

Provide a clear geographical and chronological picture of the rollout.

- **Locations:** Publish a map showing existing and planned monitoring locations.
- **Milestones:** Provide a clear timeline towards March 2030, with interim stages and explanations of uncertainties affecting delivery.
- **Updates:** Confirm when community members will next receive information and how regularly progress will be reported.

1D. Explain how shared learning and AI inform monitoring decisions

Clarify how collaboration and technology help Thames Water interpret water quality findings and identify appropriate responses.

- **Shared learning:** Explain how data and findings are shared across water companies, including through Water UK, and whether this can reduce monitoring duplication, costs or delays.
- **AI:** Explain how AI supports interpretation of monitoring data and decisions about monitor deployment, including its limitations.

Explain why shared findings cannot necessarily replace monitoring at individual locations.

Company response and outstanding clarification

Thames Water said it could make information clearer and agreed to investigate how its internal map could be presented publicly. They also agreed to clarify the specific use of AI in this programme.
Thames Water also said they already share learning across the sector, but they still needs to monitor watercourses near their own discharge points to understand how its discharges affects water quality.

No firm timetable for a public map or interim rollout milestones was agreed. The formal response should address these requests, including reporting frequency and how findings and resulting action will be explained.

Performance Review

Challenging the company's performance and service delivery

Q2. What measurable improvement in leakage and supply interruptions will you commit to over the next 12 months and how will you identify and prioritise local areas that experience repeated leaks for more permanent intervention?

Context from the session:

Repeated leaks raised concerns about disruption, wasted water and lasting repairs. Thames Water described weather related ground movement, increased leak detection and plans to expand mains replacement. They also outlined current financial support for customers during a supply interruption, including the Priority Services Register (PSR).

Some members found the figures reassuring; others wanted clearer evidence of underlying performance, local priorities and timescales for permanent repairs.

Members sought clearer priority support information and measurable improvements in leakage and reliability.

Existing activity context:

The existing Spring 2026 Action Plan address incident communications, customer support and workforce development, but contains no commitment specifically covering measurable leakage or supply interruption improvement. Thames Water also described existing leak detection technology, new apprenticeships and a mains replacement programme. These provide context; they do not establish a new 12 month improvement commitment.

New actions requested by community members:

2A. Set measurable improvements and report progress clearly

Confirm what improvements Thames Water will commit to delivering on leakage and supply interruptions over the next 12 months.

- Specify the measures and starting figures against which progress will be assessed.
- Publish actual numbers alongside percentages for consistent periods, distinguishing leaks detected, leaks repaired and major bursts.
- Explain what the figures show about improvement, how weather affects comparisons and how planned work will reduce repeated problems and disruption.

2B. Explain how repeated leaks will be addressed through lasting repairs and mains replacement

Show how Thames Water identifies recurring problems and decides where to repair or replace pipes.

- **Causes and prevention:** Explain the main causes of leakage, what Thames Water can address and whether preventative measures could reduce the effects of dry conditions.
- **Local priorities and delivery:** Identify areas prioritised for intervention, distinguish temporary repairs from intended permanent solutions and explain expected timings and delivery constraints.
- **Replacement decisions and progress:** Explain how long-term costs, materials and repeated failures inform repair-versus-replacement decisions. Show replacement progress visually against the size of the network, distinguishing completed work, current commitments and longer-term plans.

Performance Review

Challenging the company's performance and service delivery

Q2. What measurable improvement in leakage and supply interruptions will you commit to over the next 12 months and how will you identify and prioritise local areas that experience repeated leaks for more permanent intervention?

New actions requested by community members:

2C. Explain how recruitment and partnerships can increase repair-team capacity
Set out how Thames Water is addressing shortages of repair teams, including where local recruitment is difficult.

- Explain how existing recruitment, apprenticeships, training and employment partnerships contribute.
- Assess whether additional partnerships could help increase capacity, including opportunities for individuals from disadvantaged groups.

Company response and clarification required:

Martin Padley, the Water Director, expressed no objection to the captured requests during the session. He specifically supported sharing how Thames Water prioritises leak repairs and decides which water mains to replace. He also agreed to provide a mains replacement graph.

Martin Padley described existing recruitment activity. David Bird, the Transformation and Retail Director, outlined continued efforts to increase Priority Services Register coverage.

The response did not specify measurable 12-month improvements.

Thames Water should address these points formally, confirming what it will deliver and explaining any request it cannot accept.

Q&A

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

Q3. What will you commit to doing to give customers clear, regular updates on Thames Water's financial position, what is within your control, and any changes for services and investment?

Context from the session:

Members wanted understandable financial information directly from Thames Water. Caroline Murdoch, the Director of Communications, explained the proposed restructuring, required approvals and plans to maintain services and investment. Members valued the explanation but challenged the assumption that publishing information online was enough. They requested direct updates and clearer financial information that customers could find easily, without having to search the website or understand technical terms.

A follow-up question explored investors' motivations and how investment is funded. The discussion clarified the distinction between financing infrastructure upfront and customers contributing to its cost through bills over time.

Existing activity context

The Spring Accountability sessions contain explanations of restructuring and bill funding, alongside TH10[3], which seeks feedback on the bill insert. This is useful supporting activity, but TH10 does not cover ongoing financial updates across communication channels. Caroline Murdoch also described a customer facing myth-buster webpage already being developed.

New actions requested by community members:

3A. Provide clear, direct updates on the financial position

Explain the financial position, key developments and implications for services and investment in plain language.

- Direct communication: Use suitable direct channels, including email or bill communications, rather than relying solely on members finding website information.
- Content and timing: Explain what is within Thames Water's control, what depends on other parties and when further updates will be provided.
- A member suggested monthly emails; this was not agreed as the reporting frequency. Communication preferences should be addressed through 5A.

3B. Make financial explanations and key facts easy to find

Provide a prominent, accessible explanation of restructuring and important milestones, building on the myth-buster described during the session.

Explain the relationship between investment, investor returns and customer bills clearly. Distinguish who provides finance upfront from how infrastructure costs are recovered over time.

A website ticker or changing facts box was suggested as one possible format, rather than an agreed technical solution.

[3] Thames Water, Action 10: *Seek customer feedback on the bill insert explaining how customers' money is spent, using this to inform next year's approach.*

Q&A

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

Q3. What will you commit to doing to give customers clear, regular updates on Thames Water's financial position, what is within your control, and any changes for services and investment?

Company response and outstanding clarification

Caroline Murdoch acknowledged the communication points, said the company would consider making information more prominent and confirmed that a myth-buster webpage was already being developed. She did not commit to a regular direct email schedule or a particular website feature.

The formal response should confirm how and when Thames Water will provide financial updates and how these will answer community members' questions. Any plans for future financing or ownership should be clearly presented.

Q&A

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

Q4. What have you learned from better-performing water companies and what one or two approaches will you commit to adopting over the next 12 months to improve customers' experience?

Context from the session:

Thames Water described learning from other water companies and Octopus Energy.

David Bird outlined a new program called 'Customer First', combining staff training with changes to how customer problems are managed. Pilots give colleagues ownership of cases, helping customers avoid being passed between teams and supporting resolution. He reported improved satisfaction and resolution in the pilots and committed to rolling out the approach over 18 months. However, no 12-month delivery milestones were committed to. This needs to be provided by Thames Water

A follow-up broadened the question to learning about major strategic risks, including climate change and cyber disruption; the response referred to Thames Water's 2055 vision.

Existing activity context

The Spring 2026 Action Plan already describes customer feedback informing service changes and investment in workforce capability. Actions TH05[4] and TH06[5] cover staff training on communications during incidents and crises. The wider work to improve how customer cases are handled should therefore be treated as a separate action.

New actions requested by community members:

4A. Confirm delivery of the new customer-service approach

Set out how the stated 18-month rollout will give colleagues ownership of issues through to resolution.

- Delivery: Confirm the scope and stages of the rollout, including what will be introduced within the 12 months asked by the original question.
- Customer benefit: Explain how the pilot results relate to the improvements members should expect as the approach expands.
- Distinguish the rollout from training and proactive contact already underway.

The request does not require creating another proactive team.

4B. Clarify how learning from others informs long-term resilience

Explain how the 2055 vision and supporting plans address the broader question about learning from other organisations and preparing for major risks.

The follow-up explicitly raised cyber disruption as well as climate change. The response referred to climate change and population growth but did not specifically address cyber resilience.

This remains an outstanding clarification Thames Water needs to provide.

[4] Thames Water, Action 5: *Train wider teams to provide video content for customers during incidents, supporting the planned expansion of video-based communication.*

[5] Thames Water, Action 6: *Deliver guidance and media-handling training for an expanded crisis communications team, using debriefs, exercises and customer feedback to improve communications continuously.*

Q4. What have you learned from better performing water companies and what one or two approaches will you commit to adopting over the next 12 months to improve customers' experience?

Company response and outstanding clarification

David Bird explicitly committed to rolling out the new case management approach across the business over 18 months, rather than the 12 months referenced in the question. He also described an already established team using data to contact community members proactively about potential problems.

The formal response should confirm rollout arrangements, including clear, specific milestones across the next 12 months. Thames Water should also explain how learning from other organisations helps it prepare for long-term risks, including climate change and cyber disruption.

Q&A

Further questions about the company's services and accountability

Q5. What will you focus on to rebuild customers' trust and how will customers be able to see evidence that it is working?

Context from the session:

Caroline Murdoch said rebuilding trust depended on delivery and clearer communication about completed work and local benefits. She described communication moving from planned investment towards completed work and local benefits, communicated via community groups and social channels. Members wanted more direct contact and a say in how they receive information..

One member suggested providing a practical guide explaining how households can work with Thames Water, both for new and existing households.

Existing activity context

Existing actions address local investment communications and reporting of improvements. These are existing activities rather than evidence that the new engagement requests are already met. TH01[6] relates specifically to the drinking water campaign and does not cover the wider issues of rebuilding trust or improving household engagement

New actions requested by community members

5A. Ask members how they want to hear from Thames Water

Consult on preferred channels, subjects and levels of engagement, including opportunities to choose whether to receive additional updates.
Use this feedback to shape communication, including the direct financial updates requested under 3A, without making members repeatedly search for information themselves.

5B. Explore a practical guide for new and existing households

Explore a simple guide explaining how households can work with Thames Water, access useful information and understand what each party can do.
Consider how it could be offered when someone moves into a property and remain available to existing households.
Confirm the proposed approach and content before treating production as an agreed deliverable.

Company response and outstanding clarification

Caroline Murdoch welcomed the guide suggestion and said she could look into it. This was an undertaking to explore the idea, not a commitment to produce a particular document by a set date. The company also described its existing direction towards reporting delivered improvements and local outcomes.

The formal response should explain how communication preferences will be gathered and whether the household guide will be taken forward.

[6] Thames Water, Action 1: *Repeat the drinking water quality campaign between July and September 2026 to remain visible to customers and improve reassurance about tap water quality.*

Attendance list

Tess Fayers	Waste and Bioresources Director of Thames Water
Martin Padley	Water Director of Thames Water
David Bird	Chief Customer and Transformation Officer of Thames Water
Caroline Murdoch	Director of Communications at Thames Water
Clare Glen	Head of Qualitative Research at Taylor McKenzie Research (TMcK) – Lead facilitator
Rob Wilson	Chairman for Consumer Council for Water (CCW) – Chair
10 x Participants	Water Voice Community Members under Thames Water

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Good evening, everyone, and thank you very much for joining us this evening. My name is Rob Wilson, and I'll be chairing tonight's discussion. I'm the Chairman of the Consumer Council for Water, and tonight's session is part of our Water Voice programme. The purpose of Water Voice is simple but very important, to give customers a stronger, more direct voice in how their company, Thames Water in this case, performs, communicates and improves.

This session is about accountability. It's an opportunity for community members to question senior leaders from Thames Water directly about issues that matter most, what needs to improve, and what will change as a result of this discussion. I'm in a funny position tonight, I'm Chairman of the meeting and Chairman of CCW, but also a Thames Water customer, so I'm slightly wearing another hat tonight, and I've just had a very interesting experience with Thames Water which may or may not be relevant later.

This is not a complaints hearing and it's not a technical inquiry. It is a structured, customer-led conversation focused on accountability, learning and agreeing clear, practical actions. The topics we'll cover tonight have not been chosen by the company, they have been shaped by community members, through pre-task activities, briefing session, Spotlight Research and wider Water Voice discussions, so this is very much your agenda.

I want to set a clear tone at the outset. We expect this to be a respectful but challenging discussion. Community members should feel able to speak openly and honestly about their experiences and their expectations. Equally, we expect clear and transparent responses from Thames Water's senior team.

When you're not speaking, please keep your microphone muted to avoid any background noise and playback for other people. The session is being fully transcribed, and the agreed outcomes will be published. Thames Water will also be expected to publish an action plan responding to the commitments made, and that transparency is a key part of what makes this process meaningful tonight.

In terms of ground rules, we take one person at a time, keep contributions focused and concentrate on forward-looking actions, what will change, by when, and how customers will know.

Now I'd like to briefly introduce those joining us this evening. First, our independent facilitator from Taylor McKenzie Research, Clare Glen, who will guide the customer discussion and ensure all voices are heard equally. Representing Thames Water this evening we have four members of their senior team, although I must say I'm disappointed not to see the Chief Executive joining us again tonight, so that's Tessa Fayers, Wastewater and Bioresources Director, Martin Padley, Water Director, David Bird, Chief Customer and Transformation Officer, and Caroline Murdoch, Director of Communications.

Thank you again everyone for being here, it's much appreciated. I'll now hand over to Clare to explain how the session will run. Over to you, Clare.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much, Rob. Before we begin with a round of introductions, I just wanted to briefly explain how the names and the transcript will be handled from the end of the session. In the room this evening we'll just use first names, everyone's got those up on the screen, so thank you for that. In the published transcript and report, customer names will be anonymised. After the session, community members will have the opportunity to flag anything personal that they would prefer to be removed or further anonymised before the transcript's published. The purpose of the transcript is to accurately reflect the discussion that we've had tonight and the actions that we've agreed, it's not to single out anyone in particular.

As we reviewed in the briefing session, there are three main parts to the session tonight. The first part, we'll review part of the existing action plan, and challenge Thames Water on the action, or

actions, the community agreed needed to be strengthened. The second part of the session, we'll ask a new performance challenge question, and that's been developed from the issues that community members prioritised in the briefing session that we ran last month. The third part of the session, we'll move into a shorter, quick-fire Q&A where community members will ask the additional questions that we prioritised and got together in the briefing session itself.

For each of the two questions we will use the same accountability cycle, so a community member who has willingly volunteered, thank you so much to the five people that will be asking the questions, they will ask the agreed question, and then Thames Water will have a five-minute timed response on that question. Community members will have a chance to then come in at that point and react to that response and identify what they found was clear, if there's anything missing from the answer, and what needs to be strengthened.

In the background we will have our team of analysts, and they are going to create a live document capturing the specific actions and outcomes that should form part of Thames Water's follow-up action plan. We'll share those in the session, and then Thames Water will have a short opportunity to explain if any of those proposed actions are not feasible, and why.

During the Q&A session we'll use a lighter version of that process. Again, a nominated community member will ask the question, the company will respond, and the question asker and then wider community can follow up on that, and any additional comments or commitments will be captured live again.

Hopefully everyone understands that process and is happy to proceed on that basis. Before we get started and get into the main discussion, it will be great to do a quick round of introductions, so could everyone just say their name and whereabouts you're based. I'm just going to go around the room as I see you on my screen, so Community Member 1, you're up on the top left of my screen and smiling at me, so if you wouldn't mind just starting the round of introductions that would be great.

Community Member 1: My name's Community Member 1 and I live in London, in Wimbledon.

Community Member 2: I'm Community Member 2, I live in Swindon.

Community Member 3: Hi, I'm Community Member 3, I live in South West London about halfway between Tooting and Wimbledon.

Community Member 4: I'm Community Member 4, I come from Thatcham in Berkshire.

Community Member 5: Hi, I'm Community Member 5 and I'm in Finchley.

Community Member 6: Evening, I'm Community Member 6, I'm from Chigwell in West Essex.

Community Member 7: Hiya, I'm Community Member 7, I'm from Berkshire.

Community Member 8: Hello, I'm Community Member 8 and I live in West Hampstead.

Community Member 9: Hi, I'm Community Member 9, I live in Croydon, London.

Community Member 10: Hi there, my name's Community Member 10 and I live in Reading, Berkshire.

TMcK Facilitator: I think that's everybody in the room, so I'd love to hand back to Rob to kick off the session.

CCW Chair: Thanks Clare, thanks everyone. We'll now begin with our first question which looks back at commitments already made in Thames Water's previous action plan. During the briefing

session community members agreed that progress on installing water quality monitors, under Action 9, and how Thames Water acts on their findings, needed further scrutiny. So, I'm going to invite Community Member 3 to ask the agreed question, and I think Tessa and Martin from Thames Water are going to take the answer on this.

Tessa Fayers: It's just me, Rob, actually.

CCW Chair: Okay, it's just Tess. Okay, thank you.

Community Member 3: One of my particular interests is around water quality and sewage, and one of the things that we discussed was although Thames Water have made this commitment, we didn't get a sense of scale. So, what I'd like to know is building on the commitments in Action 9[7], what interim milestones will you commit to between now and 2030? And what will you commit to reporting, so that we can get some idea of the progress of the rollout and understand the scale of it, and what action is being taken in response to the monitoring findings? Sorry, that's a multi-part question and I do apologise!

Tessa Fayers: No problem, no need to apologise, Community Member 3.

CCW Chair: Before you answer Tess, thank you, Community Member 3. In responding, it will be really helpful if Thames could be as specific as possible ensuring your response is very much to the point and free from jargon, because obviously not everybody's a water industry expert. And to community members, please listen very carefully and make a note of anything that feels unclear, feels a bit incomplete or isn't strong enough. So please also do that. Over to you, Tess.

Tessa Fayers: Thank you, Rob. The first thing I thought might be helpful is just to anchor everybody in what actually is a continuous water quality monitor. The way that we look at these is, they are much like river health trackers. What they allow us to do is, they allow us to understand what's happening in the river, they stay in the river, they repeatedly monitor water conditions, and they sit upstream and downstream of our sewage works and also our storm overflows. What they allow us to do is, they allow us to compare the water before and after it passes through our discharge.

Why are we doing them? There's a simple reason why we are putting continuous water quality monitors into rivers, because we actually have a legal requirement to do that, so under Section 82 of the Environment Act 2021 we're required to install a fleet of monitors. The practical purpose is to understand how our discharge affects rivers. I guess the most important thing is that they allow us to use the evidence that they build to then inform lots of our programmes. So, they help us understand what we need to do about storm discharge reduction and quality improvements. What they help us do is, they help us understand beyond did a discharge happen, to what changed in the river?

What they look at is, they look at measures like acidity, alkalinity, cloudiness or turbidity of the water, how much dissolved oxygen is available, i.e., how much health is there for fish to be able to live without gasping for air, and they also look at ammonium. From all of those measures that are taken, it's quite a complex group of measures, what they allow us to do is to understand ammonia levels within the watercourse, and together what they allow us to do is to see the change in water conditions over time. We can then combine those to understand what action we need to take. As I said, it could be more structural in investment, or it could be that we might want to look at an operational response if we see something that might spark an interest.

The programme itself requires us to deploy 314 monitors by March 2030, that covers 25% of our storm overflows and treated water discharges, and so far, we have installed 51 monitors. Quite a large number of them, so around 21 of them, are in the Oxford area, and that's simply been because of where we've had a focus. You'll probably appreciate, I think one of our members said

[7] Action 9: *Continue phased installation of Continuous Water Quality Monitors upstream and downstream of assets, covering around 25% by 2030, and publish updates on further installation sites.*

they're from Thatcham, that sort of area is quite sensitive in terms of watercourses, so we've targeted those where there is a higher sensitivity.

What we want to do is make sure that they're always accurate, so we've put in place processes to ensure they're continually reliable and well maintained. Also, what we're doing is ensuring we've got the right response for them in terms of maintenance so that they're constantly available, and we're spending about £4m a year on ensuring that fleet of monitors remains reporting information in a very, very regular frequency.

What are the insights telling us so far? There's quite a lot of early findings at the moment. I guess the first thing I would say is we're working as an industry, facilitated by Water UK, they're helping us really think hard about how we can best display information to customers. As you're probably aware, we were one of the first companies to have a storm discharge map. But actually, because of the science behind some of these, they can potentially be a little bit more difficult to interpret, so we're thinking really hard about the best way to provide that information to our customers. We don't actually have an obligation to do that before 2030, but obviously that information is available if customers want to write to us and they've got a particular enquiry about a particular location.

What they allow us to do is, they allow us to understand changes, so we can look at frequent spillers, and particularly understand what's happening at those frequent spillers. Particularly we've got sites at South Moreton and Ludgershall. At those sites what we're seeing is that although they're continually spilling, because they're in groundwater affected areas, the impact on the watercourse can't really be seen from what's happening on the monitors.

We have seen changes, I'll need to be honest, these monitors also help us understand where changes in the river health also coincide with our activity. For instance, treated wastewater, although we're operating within our permits and our parameters, actually you can see an impact into the watercourse. Princes Risborough is a good example of a site where we've seen the impact of our activity, but it's not a detrimental impact, but there is obviously impact there.

Also conditions upstream matter too. What's happening upstream is really important, and we can see that, so that we can then calibrate our impact compared to what might be happening upstream. Middleton Stoney, which is in Oxfordshire, is a site, for instance, where we've seen upstream impact, which is reinforcing the message that it's not just ourselves that are impacting a watercourse, there are multiple other agencies involved in river health more broadly.

CCW Chair: Okay, Tess, your five minutes is up.

Tessa Fayers: Oh right, okay.

CCW Chair: I'm not sure how much of the specific question you answered there, but I'll leave that up to the panel to decide, and you will have a chance to come back. But thank you for that response so far.

What happens now is, we take a pause and we turn back to the community members. This part is about testing whether what you've just heard fully answers the concerns behind the question. I'm going to pass back to Clare to moderate that discussion.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you so much, Rob. Just to say, as you listen to each other, I've seen lots of you writing notes as you were listening, but it would be great as you listen to each other, ask questions and think about the response. I'd love you to think about do you understand what's changed? Do you understand what still needs to happen in terms of the question that you posed? Do you know when it will happen, do you know about timeframes? And does it go far enough in terms of answering the question? I want you to tell me what feels concrete, what still

feels vague or uncertain, and what, if anything, is missing from that response, and most importantly, what specific commitment you would like Thames Water to make in this area.

Community Member 3, as you posed the question, I wonder whether you wanted to come back first on that?

Community Member 3: Yeah, sure. There's a couple of things that I found really helpful in that response, and I think the figure should be published. Knowing that you've installed 51 monitors against I think you said it was a target of 314 by 2030, that's really good to know because it's not just a nebulous 25% now, it's an actual concrete figure with a visible scale of how well you're progressing against that.

I think also knowing that you're spending £4m on water quality monitoring is also really valuable to me as a customer, because you hear so much about sewerage spills and terrible water quality, but knowing that there's concrete activity that looks like it's progressing quite well against that target, and a significant investment in funds, reassures me as a customer that you're actually doing something concrete.

There is one thing I did want to question though. You said that there were some areas that you were focusing on at the moment because of specific sensitivities. Is that because of the sensitivity of the environment, so is it things like you're focusing on vulnerable chalk streams, for example, which are a really challenging environment to maintain, but also really good from a wildlife and environment perspective. So, are you focusing on the more vulnerable areas first, and then rolling the water quality monitoring out to perhaps less vulnerable watercourses? That was just a further query based on the response.

CCW Chair: There will be an opportunity to go back to Thames Water but first let's stick with what panel members felt and thought about those answers, so back to you, Clare.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, Rob. Community Member 3, that's really interesting, because we did talk in the briefing session about putting a measurable number against that 25%, I think as a panel we thought what's 25% of what? Having that as a commitment might be interesting, having that communicated to the community.

And then your point about the vulnerable areas, are you wanting that to be highlighted by Thames Water in terms of how they're prioritising sites, or how they're defining these other areas, would that be helpful? Or do you want a specific commitment around that?

Community Member 3: I think it would be useful to know, because obviously they've got a massive number of watercourses they need to look at. So, understanding a little bit about how they prioritise which are the most important ones, whether that's based on the number of people served, or the level of pollution that's existent, or the vulnerability of the environment. I think knowing what some of the factors feeding into that are would be really helpful.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks, Community Member 3, thanks for asking the question. Can I just put that out to the rest of the panel, what does everyone else think? Please feel free to jump in at this point.

Community Member 7: I agree, I wanted to know what "sensitivities" was, I would like to understand, a bit more explanation. That to me is a terminology.

TMcK Facilitator: Sorry, who said that I couldn't see who was saying that?

Community Member 7: Me. Sorry, Community Member 7 said it.

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 7. Sorry, can you repeat that please, I couldn't quite hear

you?

Community Member 7: I'd like to understand what sensitivities are, that's what my question was. That's just terminology, but what is it? I live by the Thames, is that a sensitive area or not, you know?

TMcK Facilitator: Okay. Hi, Community Member 2, I can see you waving.

Community Member 2: Mine sort of relates to that. I understand that obviously you mentioned about the Section 82 from the Environment Agency that you need to have these meters in place. Are you basing where you're putting them on what you're getting from the Environment Agency, have they got a say in where you put the monitors? Or is it from a Thames Water perspective on where they should actually be placed?

TMcK Facilitator: Would you like a commitment based on that?

Community Member 2: Yeah, just some understanding of why they're being put in the different places.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, great. Community Member 6, I can see your hand up as well.

Community Member 6: I'd like two commitments. One, a geographical map showing where these sites are, both existing and the new ones in the plan, so we can plan ahead and think ahead. And secondly, I'd like all that information in a timeline from now, 2026 to 2030. Because those numbers are quite large, although 51 have been installed, the 314 by 2030 or 25% thereof, is a bit confusing unless you see it in a timeline, a diagram.

TMcK Facilitator: And it was something we talked about in the session, wasn't it, is seeing those measurable milestones from now to then. Lots of nods there. Community Member 8, please come in there.

Community Member 8: What I was going to say is, that's obviously 260 in three years, so that's quite a lot. What does it cost to actually install one, because the £4m a year figure was based on I think that 51, and that was just actual monitoring and keeping them going. So, what is that in terms of how much it's going to cost to actually install them?

My other point was, again I'm very novice when it comes to water, but if it's being done by a centralised water thing that all the suppliers are doing in different parts of the country that they supply, is it possible to share all your findings so that maybe you don't have to build 260? You can actually just share all of that information with less investment across all the different suppliers, so that you get the information that you need much quicker and at less cost, and then you can work out what needs to be done to reduce the impact, or clean it better, or clear up the rivers anywhere, because you've got a centralised system of clear information that seems to work in different parts of the country. Maybe even AI will be able to consolidate all of that for everybody very quickly and soon. You know what I'm saying? Is Thames Water repeating on information that another supplier is doing, and they're not joining up. It's almost like they're in competition instead of this is a shared thing, and maybe that would be quicker. I don't know.

Also, when she said you're monitoring and there's a clear impact, but it's not detrimental, that therefore means that the impact has to be an improvement if it's not being detrimental. I didn't understand what she meant by that. Ultimately, we don't want to just monitor stuff, we want to get the information as to how can we improve on it and put action in place to rectify that, rather than just continuously monitoring, monitoring, monitoring. You're trying to get to the answers as quickly as possible and then put the money into resolving the problems. Sorry, very longwinded question.

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: No, that's great, lots of interesting points there. Does anybody else want to pick up from what Community Member 8 said, agree, disagree, or try and shape that into a commitment maybe that you would like to see? Community Member 3, you've got your hand up.

Community Member 3: I agree with Community Member 8's point, if we're monitoring and there's an impact, it would be good to know if there's a negative impact what actions are then taken? Is the quality decreasing because Thames Water's sewage plant is not working well, or is it decreasing because some kind of organisation or factory is dumping stuff into the river upstream that is then getting picked up and coming out of the sewage plant downstream? If there's a negative impact, can you identify where that negative impact is coming from and what actions are then taken, I think, is the important point.

Community Member 8: I guess the point is that maybe because they're monitoring different parts of the country, and when they say "sensitivities," each area's got various different geographical/geological make-up, that there isn't a very clear answer to that. But maybe that's why I was saying is that certain things might be more detrimental in one particular area than another. I'm guessing, I don't know. Could they team up to gather that information and identify areas of commonality, and join those up with other suppliers to get a running theme? Because I guess it's trying to work out patterns, isn't it, rather than … I don't know, but I feel like it's more of a mathematical problem of identifying different areas that kind of have the same commonalities, or the same sensitivities, and then working out what is affecting that area, or making it worse or better. It's obviously a complicated thing otherwise they would have just solved it.

TMcK Facilitator: It's a great point. Does anyone else want to come in with any other thoughts on this one, any other particular commitments you would like to see from Thames Water? [Silence] No.

It sounds like reporting what the monitoring is showing, is a point that was being made as well, about the findings, reporting on it in a customer friendly way, we've talked about. And showing what happens as a result, so when the monitoring highlights a problem, I think is what we talked about in the briefing session as well.

Is there anything else before we leave this topic that anyone else would like to raise who's not had a chance to speak?

Community Member 8: Is the representative able to give us any of these answers? Because some of these questions might be completely irrelevant if we understood everything better.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm letting you all download first, and then we're going to get to Tess, because I can see her chomping at the bit wanting to come in with all the answers and come back on this. The only other thing that we mentioned in the briefing session, we talked about timings just now and seeing clearer milestones. Do we want something committed in terms of when we're going to see the next update, as an action?

Community Member 5: Very much so, yeah. It doesn't have to be cast in stone but at least having goals that they're trying to get there and we see progress. But "Oh well, we'll be done by 2030," doesn't sound realistic.

TMcK Facilitator: So just a sense of how realistic that target is?

Community Member 5: Yeah, absolutely.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay. If there's nothing else to add, I can see people on my team have been scribbling away in the background and capturing some of the things we've just talked about, so I'd love to share the actions with you and we can have a chat through those. Just bear with me

while it gets up on the screen. Can everyone see that okay?

Community Member 1: Yes.

Community Member 6: Can you make it bigger?

TMcK Facilitator: Yes, I can. It's small writing, isn't it? I can zoom in a bit. Is that better, can everyone see that now? Okay. We've not seen this output, but this is just a way of the team capturing what has been discussed. The first column is around what Tess talked through there in terms of just capturing some highlights. Obviously, there's lots of information that Tess told us about, that's some of the highlights we've captured. What they're doing into the future, so deploying those extra monitors.

Then the column here is some of the actions that we've captured just as a first draft of some of the things we've mentioned tonight. Again, we can change the wording, maybe there's things that you want to add or take away now, but this is a first stab at what we've talked about in terms of the actions. I'm going to chat through these now, so have a think about is it clear, is it specific, does it have a timeframe on it that we'd like to ask about, and would it make a meaningful difference for you to hear about these things?

The first one [A] is to clearly communicate water quality monitor activity and programmes to customers, so publish the water quality monitor deployment figures and spending on them, the investment that Community Member 3 talked about. Clarify the prioritisation method behind water quality monitor deployment, which locations are targeted first, and explain all those deciding factors clearly. Explain the jargon, what does a sensitive area mean, so helping customers really understand what that means.

[B] Clearly explain the causes of poor water quality results, so if it was picked up by monitors. Just a bit more of a customer understanding point again.

[C] Publish a map to show where existing and new sites are for water quality monitor deployment and also include a timeline or diagram so milestones can be clear to customers. I think that was Community Member 6's point there captured. And presenting that information in a visual timeline ideally from now until 2030.

[D] To clarify whether monitoring data and findings are being shared across water companies via Water UK, and whether this could reduce the scale of cost of the individual rollout. Hopefully Community Member 8, that maybe captures your point there.

[E] To provide clear progress milestones and set an end date for delivering this action.

There's a couple of points weaved through on deadlines, and perhaps we can shape that into one or two points there, but hopefully that captures everything that we've talked about. Is there anything else you'd like to add into that, or to change, adapt, expand, before we go back to Thames Water just for comment on that?

Community Member 6: Did we cover costs in all those five points?

TMcK Facilitator: I think we did. We mention investment. Where is it now? Did I see investment somewhere? I'm sure I saw it.

Community Member 3: First bullet point under A.

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah, there we are, spending/investment.

Community Member 6: Perfect, thank you Community Member 3 and Clare.

Session transcript

Community Member 8: One more thing I was going to say is, when it's relating to water quality, is that all in one subject as in the health of the rivers and the general wider water, and the water that's coming out of your tap? Is that kind of all one topic, or are they two separate things in terms of water quality?

TMcK Facilitator: I think that they're two separate things, but maybe Tess when she comes in at that point can give us a bit of an explanation on that. It is confusing though, the terminology's similar, I can understand.

Community Member 6: Do we want to throw in AI and how that is helping Thames Water?

TMcK Facilitator: You can throw in anything, yeah.

Community Member 6: It was mentioned by somebody else and I'm just thinking maybe just get that on the sheet as well?

Community Member 8: Also, are we worried about it in terms of cyber-attacks and stuff? That was going to be another one. I was going to throw that right in the end, Community Member 6, if you're up for that kind of stuff.

Community Member 6: I think that they're very important points, because it's our infrastructure that somebody could target.

Community Member 8: It's almost like to be honest now some of this is less important than that. But anyway, sorry, that's a separate point.

CCW Chair: There is a Q&A at the end of course that you can raise those issues.

TMcK Facilitator: Yeah. For everyone that's not had a chance to speak, so I'm thinking Community Member 1, Community Member 7, Community Member 10, Community Member 9, can I bring you in at this point. I know you're nodding along, but just for the transcript, how are you feeling about the actions that we've created here? Is there something that you are in agreement with? Is there anything else you would like to add?

Community Member 1: I think it's fine, it's excellent really sort of thing, and there's nothing I would like to add really.

Community Member 10: Yeah. All this sort of stuff I was thinking was pretty much hashed out already, so yeah, I'm just kind of observing this section. I think I'm good with it as it is at this moment.

Community Member 9: I believe all the points are important, and at the moment I don't have any issues, and everything is great.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks, Community Member 9. Any last final comments before we hand back to Rob? [Silence] No. Rob, thanks so much, we'll hand back to you.

CCW Chair: Thanks everyone, that's a really good start to the evening. Obviously, there were a number of questions raised during that session, and now it's an opportunity for Thames Water to answer those. It's also an opportunity for them to have a look at the commitments that their customers are asking them to make and say whether they think they're feasible, or explain clearly why they're not, if there are any constraints, whatever those constraints are, regulatory, financial, legal, whatever they are, to set them out transparently so that we can record them as part of this session.

I'll start by handing back to Tess, but obviously if there are questions that other members feel they want to answer, then please feel free to come in after Tess. So over to you, Tess.

Session transcript

Tessa Fayers: Thank you, Rob. Thank you very much for your questions, and Community Member 3, for the feedback that you've given, and everybody's interest in this area, it is a very interesting area.

The first thing is about how we're prioritising. The good news is that we already have a dedicated web page for continuous water quality monitoring, which has I would say relatively limited information on it, but we can build on that, and that helps us state where the monitors are installed.

I guess the first thing is, across our estate we have a number of streams with certain designations or sensitive chalk habitats, and we've also got designated bathing waters now as well. What we'll take into consideration is, whether it's an Area of Special Conservation, whether there's the chalk habitat, whether we've got particular bathing water, and other environmental variables as well. A good example, I think one of the panel asked do the EA[8] influence where these monitors go, and the answer to that is absolutely, yes. We agree the programme with them, but then in the moment they might ask us to deploy additional monitors. For instance, we've recently deployed a monitor downstream of our Cassington sewage treatment works near Oxford/Witney, and the reason that we've done that is, as part of the drought response in that watercourse. So, the EA are very much part of the conversation, and they will influence and work with us on where these monitors are installed.

So, I guess that's the first question really about prioritisation and how we've already got that on our website, so we're surfacing that information already. And the EA do have a say, and maybe we can make some pointers about how stakeholders then can influence where those monitors are going.

One of you asked about whether or not we could publish a map, and I'm going to have to take that away. We do actually have a map internally of where the monitors are, hence, the reason I knew quite a lot were around Oxford, but it's the practicalities of how we would surface that information. So, I'd have to look at that, at the same time as having a think about how we can give you some programmatic milestones.

I think it was nice to hear you wouldn't hold us to the dates. You'll probably appreciate there is some complexity. We don't always own the land of where we put these monitors, and so sometimes getting them in can be a bit tricky, because we have to have long conversations with landowners about where we can put them, because we don't necessarily always have rights. You have to put a little kiosk out which holds all the equipment, and sometimes solar panels to make sure there's enough power to the unit, so it can be a bit tricky.

I think we also touched on the cost to install, and you're absolutely right, the £4m a year is just maintaining them. I think they're round about £100,000 when you actually put the entire installation in context, which will include the planning for it, it will include the monitor itself and the equipment that goes with it. So, it's quite an involved process, there is quite a lot of investment behind this, and it's part of the Water Industry National Environment Programme. We've already bought all of our monitors so we know that we've got them all, it's all secure, and now it's a case of ensuring that we can then deploy them in the best possible way.

So, I think we can provide information, we can be clearer, and then what I'm going to have to look into is how we surface that information about a map, because I know that we do have a map currently already available.

With regards to AI, it's interesting, we're already using AI internally to interpret data all of the time. I'll have to take away that question about how we specifically use it in this space, because some of it is relatively new, so I'm not sure how much the AI models have learned about what we're seeing.

[8] EA: *Environment Agency*

But you asked as well about what we do when we understand more about what's happening in the watercourse, and as I said, what these instruments do is they allow us to understand what's happening, and then target investment where we're seeing, say, high spillers that have high harm, or particular issues around sites where the watercourse is responding differently to our discharge or stored discharge, for instance.

CCW Chair: Thank you, Tess, for that. I'm not sure if there are any other questions needed answering.

Tessa Fayers: Sorry, I think Community Member 8 asked a question about how we share across the sector, so maybe if I can answer that. Because the watercourses have particular parameters depending on the locality, we have to put these units proximate to our operation in the receiving watercourse. But what we can do, and do do as an industry, we are very open about sharing all of our information across the sector, because it helps us, we can then pool all of that information together, and as you say, think about how we can best respond into different themes.

But certainly, from the point of view of monitoring itself, we have to install them in the receiving watercourse, and therefore we can't necessarily say just because something was happening in Cambridge or in Wales, it's applicable to what's happening in a chalk stream at Pangbourne, for instance. So, I guess because of the sensitivity to the location, we have to be really specific, and now it's a question of how we make sure that information can be shared in a format that is really clear and easy to interpret for everybody. So that's really our big challenge over the next couple of years.

CCW Chair: Is there anything specifically on the action plan that you don't feel is appropriate or possible to deliver?

Tessa Fayers: I don't think it's inappropriate, but the technicalities of how we'd surface the map. We've done it before with the storm discharge map, but I want to reserve judgement on a timeline on that, just because of the fact that we absolutely have an obligation to do this by the end of the regulatory cycle in 2030, so we're working towards that, but I can see people saying, "That's taking too long, Tess." So, we just need to think about how we can surface the location information maybe before we start to surface the what's happening at that location information.

CCW Chair: Okay. If nobody else has anything else to add, I think we'll move on to the next section. Community Member 8 has got her hand up.

Community Member 8: Just one very tiny thing. Basically, part of the issue is around the planning and development side, so really, you've got to get the government to stop wrapping everyone up in the planning tape, because ultimately if you need to put a water monitor on a piece of land, you should have priority over the rights of … that's my view. So, it's not just your responsibility, it's coming from the government, they need to be also held accountable to help you to do what you need to do, right?

Tessa Fayers: Thank you, Community Member 8, you can come with me!

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 8, and thank you, Tess, for all those answers, we worked you hard on that first one.

So, onto the second part, we're moving to the new performance issue that community members chose to challenge Thames Water on tonight. This topic was prioritised through the pre-task and briefing session, because repeated leaks and slow repairs cause local disruption and wasted water, while community members were being asked to reduce their own water use. I'm now going to invite Community Member 5 to ask the agreed question.

Session transcript

Community Member 5: My local high road is absolutely plagued by burst water mains all the time, it bursts, it stops traffic, it destroys quite a few shops, then gets fixed, blocking quite a few days, and then one week later it starts again. So, my question is in two parts. First, what measurable improvement in leakage and supply interruptions will Thames Water commit to over the next 12 months? And how will Thames Water identify and prioritise local areas that experience repeated leaks for more permanent intervention?

CCW Chair: Thank you, Community Member 5. Again, when you respond, please be as specific as possible in replying to the question, and say what will be improved, and by when if you possibly can. And again, community members listen and note down any questions or things you feel are unclear. Martin, over to you.

Martin Padley: Thanks for the question, and it is really disrupting and I do share your frustration, because obviously it's disruptive both to the local community, but also to people travelling through the area. I think just to give you some context to start with, leakage has reduced over the last few years, so if we compare to 2019 and 2020, which is what our regulator requires us to do, leakage is reduced by 15.1% in that period. Not quite where we need to be in terms of 21% reduction, but nonetheless a decent reduction.

This year, however, has been very, very difficult for us, we've had our third drought in the last five years, and that's made the ground very, very hard, the ground has moved an awful lot. We had 30 degrees for 40 days in succession, 1% of average rainfall in July, all of which meant that a lot of leaks broke out. If I can give you some numbers just to help orientate everyone, if I compare our last "normal" year, that was 2024 when it was an average summer, we had between April and September 7,365 visible leaks break out. For the same period this year, we serviced 11,571, and everybody in the community has noticed that across the whole of the Thames Water patch.

There's not an awful lot I can do about that, I'm afraid, that is the way the water mains respond, and all companies across the country have seen an increase, it is a feature of water, I'm afraid, and ground movement.

What are we doing about it? We set off this year with a plan to actually have our biggest ever repair programme, and the reason for that was because last year was also very dry, we had a drought last year, so we were carrying quite a lot of leakage forward from last year. And actually, in the first quarter, and that's between April and June, we actually did very, very well. We were on target, and we were heading for a good performance. However, from June onwards, as we all know, the temperature got very, very hot and we saw this massive increase in leakage, and that did affect everyone. So that is what has happened, and that is why, Community Member 5, you've seen in your community water mains burst, and why I'm sure everybody around this virtual table has also seen that too.

What are doing about it? Well obviously, leakage is a key concern for all of us, and as I say, we've done a lot more in terms of this year of focusing on both finding leaks, because don't forget only 20% of leaks are visible, the remainder are invisible below the ground, and we've also done an awful lot in terms of fixing them.

So, if I just deal with the finding bit first. We've been using new technology like satellites to look for ground movements and wetness, which has been very successful. We've also used listening devices on our system, those are acoustic sensors, and we use AI to actually interpret the sound signals, and that's been incredibly successful, and in fact, we won an award in the industry that year for that very issue.

This year as a result of all of that, we've found 62% more leaks than we found last year, so we found a huge number of additional leaks, which is another reason why you will have seen the road dug

up an awful lot. This year we're planning to dig up the roads about 67,000 times; it is an enormous number of leaks that we repair over the year.

Once we've found them, we obviously then need to go and fix them, and we've got our highest ever number of repair teams, we've got 179 repair teams currently on the books. I would get more, but it's actually surprisingly difficult to get people to want to dig the road up, people don't want to do that these days. But we have seen, as a result of all that, a big increase in the number of leaks, it's something like 60% more leaks this year than last year. Again, that contributed to the disruption that you mentioned, Community Member 5.

But, of course, that's all very good, isn't it, but that's not actually fixing the root cause of the problem. The root cause of the problem is fundamentally that we need to have a big mains replacement programme. It's very boring, but it is, I'm afraid, the only way to fix this problem. In the period between 2020 and 2025, we repaired 220 kilometres of water main. This period between 2025 and 2030, we will replace 556 kilometres of water main, so more than double. And next period, that's between 2030 and 2035, we plan to replace 1,000 kilometres of water main.

Doing that is very disruptive. I go to a lot of council meetings where on the one hand, they're telling me we've got a leakage problem, on the other hand, they don't want me to dig the road up to replace the mains. It is a difficult thing, particularly in urban areas, particularly in London, and particularly in the urban areas of Thames Valley.

We're also looking at how we can reduce the pressure shocks across the system, and how we're using smart meters to identify where leaks are from the customer side, because about a third of all leaks are actually on customer side pipework, not on the company's pipework. So that's the answer, I think, for the leakage part of it. Let me see if I've missed anything.

In terms of supply interruptions, again impacted by the same weather conditions I mentioned earlier, so we've done incredibly well in terms of supply interruptions associated with water treatment works failures. If I compare back to 2023, we had 9 minutes 59 seconds of supply interruptions for customers associated to water treatment works failure. Last year that 9 minutes 59 was 16 seconds, so a significant 97% improvement.

We've also done very well in terms of supply interruptions due to trunk mains, because we focus on supply restoration in advance of mains repair. You often see mains running for longer, that's because we're trying to maintain supply to customers, that's the reason for it.

However, we have had a very big problem with trunk main bursts. Those are the massive mains that transfer large amounts of water across the system. If I compared to our last "normal" year of 2024, between April and September we'd had 22 of those trunk mains burst, in August we had 21, in September we had 21, and between April and September, instead of being 22, we had 77 trunk main bursts, and that has caused me a very, very serious issue in terms of maintaining supply, the most serious of which was in Chigwell of course where we had a very, very serious issue in those areas of north east London. So that's the reason for that.

The problem with those mains is that they're very deep often, it's not unusual for them to be five metres below the ground, quite common, so actually repairing them is major, major and actually quite specialist undertaking. We've done quite a lot in terms of responding to trunk main bursts, and I think the final example I'd give you is, in terms of our response to trunk main bursts, we try very hard to restore supply and maintain supply, because customers are not interested in how we're doing, it's for us to actually fix it. So, we've been using a new technology using Kevlar wrapping, so we've been using Kevlar to wrap mains while they're still running to allow us to continue to supply water. That gives us then time to restore the supply and then fix the leak in good time.

Session transcript

Those are just some examples of the things we've done in those two spaces. I'm happy to take any further questions of course.

CCW Chair: Okay, Martin, before we come back to you, we have to pause and go back to the community members and give them a chance to talk about the answers you've given and raise any further issues or questions that they want to raise. So can I hand back to you, Clare, to start the discussion.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks, Rob. I'd love everybody to think back to what we discussed in the briefing session on how we shaped this original question, and compare what you've just heard to what we asked for in terms of the question, so what sounded interesting, what sounded positive, or gave you confidence that things are moving in the right direction here? What still feels unclear or perhaps vague? What did they not address, are there things that are still outstanding for you in terms of what we need to find out? And does what they have described go far enough for you? But most importantly, what would you now like them to commit to going forward?

I'd love to go back to Community Member 5, because you asked the question. Lots of information there, Community Member 5, for you to respond to, so any thoughts first from you before we go out?

Community Member 5: It's really my kind of language, among other things I'm a structural engineer, so that helps to have the numbers and the no nonsense approach.

TMcK Facilitator: Oh, fantastic.

Community Member 5: Warts and all are really good. We have X problems and therefore that's what we're doing about it. As I said, it's my kind of language and I quite like it. The progression sounds good on repairs, and more importantly, the scope of instead of repairing, maintaining the whole thing and improving the infrastructure. Yeah, there are questions obviously, but at the end of the day it's all going to be a question of local problems versus the whole other picture. It's kind of a question that cannot be answered simply, but that was quite good.

TMcK Facilitator: In the briefing session the question that came up from you is because you described that burst main and repairs taking quite a long time, three to four days, and disruption to businesses and things. So, I wonder whether that answer gives you confidence that an area like yours that was experiencing repeated problems, would be escalated for more sort of permanent-?

Community Member 5: I don't think my high road is going to all of a sudden be perfect, but they are trying, and I see more of the scope of the problem. Yes, I completely get the whole I have to go the local councils and argue my point that it needs to be improved instead of just fixed repeatedly, and I can imagine the locals' lobbying pitchforks, I assume, and torches would be deployed. No, it makes sense, and it's really a case of we all have to work together to get over the worst of it. Not ideal obviously, but the infrastructure is old, and that's very much what they've inherited. It should have been done earlier, it wasn't, but it's what we have now.

TMcK Facilitator: Do you feel they've answered the question? Do you feel that you've got an appropriate response for the question that you posed?

Community Member 5: As much as can be, to be honest. Once again, I'd love if they had been able to say, "Actually we have exactly a number and we're going to talk to you next week." That's never going to happen.

CCW Chair: There was the implication on the leaks that the company could be doing better if they could hire more repair teams, and I think Martin said they had 179, but they'd like to hire more, and there were 67,000 road digs I think he said as well. I mean 179 teams doing 67,000 road

digs, that's quite a lot. I don't know how that works out.

Community Member 5: That's not uncommon, sadly, it's pretty much everywhere the same, we are screaming out for qualified people in our company.

CCW Chair: When we come back to Martin, it might be interesting to understand a bit more about what the restraints are on getting more teams out there, and whether it's a skills shortage. It seemed to be that you were saying that people didn't want to dig up the roads, I'm sure there are people who would dig up the roads if you paid them enough. Anyway, sorry, I've interrupted you, back to you.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks Rob, for adding that. Community Member 3 added something into the chat there, I don't know if you want to come in at that point?

Community Member 3: I'm just banging on again about knowing real numbers is sometimes really useful. Saying that leak detection's increased by 62% is really helpful, but actually having those concrete numbers that Martin quoted about one period in 2024 they identified 7,365 leaks, and then a comparable one this year was 11,579. Knowing actual numbers rather than [inaudible 01:01:35].

TMcK Facilitator: Oh, we're just losing you, Community Member 3. Sorry, we just lost you, if you could repeat that, please?

Community Member 3: Just having those actual numbers, the leak increase is nearly 5,000 leaks over a set period of time. If you compare two comparable periods, I think it gives a better scale of the issue to me rather than just saying it went up by 35% or something, because I find numbers more relatable than percentages sometimes.

I was also really impressed about the programme around the replacement of the major pipework and saying that it's 220 kilometres of pipework being repaired and replaced, going up to 556, and then to 1,000. Knowing those figures, which are in the leak report, I think it just gives an indication again of the scale of the issue and the problems that Thames Water are facing.

I don't think a lot of people relate repeated leakage to the ground conditions that Martin was talking about. I genuinely don't think a lot of people are thinking it's been hot for four years, so that means the soil gets drier so that things shrink, there's ground movement, and it causes a leak, they just see a repeated leak and assume the pipe's not been replaced properly. Not that there might have been repeated shifts over time because we're having drier and drier and drier summers, and that's just going to get worse and worse and worse as time goes by.

So, I think there's an education piece there at some point to be done to get people to understand why leaks happen, that it's not inefficiency on Thames Water's part, but it's a bigger climate change issue really.

TMcK Facilitator: So, would you like a commitment made around that, Community Member 3, in terms of providing that information? I'm not sure if it's in the detail probably in the reporting that the team do, but is there something that you would like to see as a customer?

Community Member 3: I think for me, it would be having more of those concrete figures reported, so you can compare and contrast what happened in 2024, to what's happening in 2026, to what might be happening in 2028 or 2030, seeing some of those actual numbers rather than percentage increases. But I do think there is a need for an education piece as well so that people understand that the issues are not inefficiency, that it's a bigger question.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you. Anyone else like to come in at this point? Community Member 2.

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Community Member 2: I'm not quite sure how to frame this. I'm just thinking in terms of the conversation we had before, so I brought up an area that's near my house and it repeatedly gets dug up because there's yet another issue. Is there any way of Thames Water giving customers some sort of idea of where the priority areas are? For example, people might get so annoyed that road is closed again, but it's going to be maybe a temporary fix rather than a permanent fix. But maybe Thames Water think at a certain time they will do a permanent fix, but obviously road closures, things like that, they have to work with the local authority to get that.

I think it will put customers' minds at rest better if they know, "Oh, in June it is planned that actually they're going to close this road and they're going to fix it properly." It would put more of a positive spin on it, I think, from a customer's point of view to know that things are in the pipeline.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay, so how they're prioritising repeated leaks in local areas. Community Member 8.

Community Member 8: I don't want to stop anyone else speaking.

TMcK Facilitator: On you go, and then anyone else can put their hand up too.

Community Member 8: How many kilometres of mains pipes do we actually have in total? So that we have some kind of idea of we've done 200, 500, 1,000. How many in total does Thames Water have, just so that again we can have some kind of idea of the scale of the challenge that we're all facing.

And then I was going to say, instead of repairing, have they got, like I mentioned before, lifecycle cost analysis to say if we actually spent more, got better materials, or just completely replaced it now, would that solve the recurring leaks? I'm sure they've thought of all of that too.

And then because I'm a recruiter, I was going to make a joke about me being able to help find people to dig up the road, but actually I don't think I could do that. But what I do think is you could team up with the Universal Credit, those sort of employment agencies where people are trying to find work, and they obviously could do a big programme of upskilling people who are continuously out of work and funnel those towards you, in the same way that other companies do that. Just an idea of how to find the resources that you need to get people to do the work.

I thought the whole satellite thing was really … that's exactly what was going to be a question, it's probably the easiest way to identify leakage. Can they do that around customers though, or is it only the meters? Yeah, that was it.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks, Community Member 8. Anyone else like to come in at this stage to add? Community Member 6.

Community Member 6: Just two quick points. I'd like more information, so a commitment, I'd like to see a graph of those repairs on the pipework. We have a 200, 500, and 1,000, I'd like a graph of that, over years, so that information can be absorbed quite quickly.

Then I'd also like some sort of data on the burst mains, the major burst that the gentleman was talking about, the 21, 21, 21 and then the 77. They are dealing with challenging times all climate related, but I don't think they're expressing that and communicating that across to the customers very well, because we just see it as same old same.

TMcK Facilitator: Great point, Community Member 6, thanks. So much more around the measurable improvements. I think you mentioned as well in the briefing session it was about seeing that 12-month window of improvement, and how they're getting back to meeting that shortfall in leakage targets, I think we talked about in that session. Is that touching on? (overtalking)

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Community Member 6: It is. Because if you water down the climate change issues, they might be performing worse than last year. We can't tell that. They're just muddying the waters in terms of what they say, because the goalposts keep moving from year to year based on the weather patterns.

TMcK Facilitator: So, bearing in mind that context, what is the real improvement?

Community Member 6: Indeed.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay. Anyone else like to jump in at this point? Community Member 10. Oh sorry, Rob, are you going to say something?

CCW Chair: Just to say, we haven't said anything about supply interruptions, we've focused on the leaks to some extent, haven't we? I wonder if anyone's got anything to say on that?

Community Member 6: The gentleman mentioned Chigwell and I live in Chigwell, so I can raise that with him. Because they repaired the major bursts very, very quickly, and they reopened the roads in conjunction with the local authorities extremely fast. So why don't they do the same with the ones that Community Member 5 was describing, the smaller scale repairs?

TMcK Facilitator: Interesting. Community Member 10, did you have a point on leaks, because you were going to come in there? I'll give you the chance to jump in, please do.

Community Member 10: I think Community Member 8 mentioned it earlier actually, I know they were saying about obviously they want to improve on the current infrastructure if possible, focusing more on the maintenance side of things. But I'm thinking obviously the climate is only going to get worse, so they're probably going to need to explore the actual replacing of a lot of the infrastructure, because as things are at the moment it is painful on both sides, for the customer and obviously for Thames Water as well. So, I was just thinking when is it a right time to do the replacements in that sense, and how long can you just keep running off of this old, existing infrastructure, factoring in obviously the weather's just going to get worse going forwards.

TMcK Facilitator: Thanks, Community Member 10. Picking up on Rob's point, is there anything that we'd like to touch on in terms of the question around the impact of supply interruptions, and any commitments we'd like to make around that?

CCW Chair: I think we were told, Clare, that the current average is just over 11 minutes, and I think the target is 5 minutes, isn't it, so Thames Water are down on their target. And my understanding the answer was it's likely to get worse. Was that anybody else's understanding?

Community Member 8: I mean the government's telling us that we've got to have three days' worth of supply, so I'm okay with five minutes, honestly. I think we just need to have a bigger picture thinking, and I think ultimately, we've all got very used to having very, very good standards of living, and I think with climate change and all the issues, within reason we need to be focusing on how to … I don't think that's big issue, I think it's more the bigger problem of how do we have enough water? How do we keep it for as long as possible and conserve it? And what can we do to mitigate the future risks?

CCW Chair: Just to be fair, Community Member 8, that's an average, so a lot of people will spend some quite big periods without supply for it to come out at 11 minutes, just so that you know.

TMcK Facilitator: Who had an experience [inaudible 00:13:10].

David Bird: Can't hear you, Clare.

TMcK Facilitator: [Inaudible 00:13:22] come in and tell us about his experience?

Session transcript

Community Member 1: We can't hear you.

TMcK Facilitator: Can you hear me now?

CCW Chair: I can hear you.

TMcK Facilitator: Some of you can, some of you can't. You can, okay. I was just going to say, I think Community Member 6 had a similar experience. Rob, you were talking about the drop-off and the average being 11, but I think Community Member 6, you were down for four or five days, were you not?

Community Member 6: I was. Seven consecutive days. Believe me, anybody on the panel tonight, seven days without fresh water and wastewater extraction, it was a nightmare. Just on the point about fresh water and bottled water supplies, it was anarchy at the supermarkets where Thames Water were distributing the water. I chose not to leave my house for six days, because people were fighting over water. So, it's a serious issue. We have been spoilt, as Community Member 8 said, and my worry is the government knows more than it shares with the public, and I wonder if Thames Water knows more than it shares with us as well?

TMcK Facilitator: Is there anything you would like to see in terms of commitments around this? Or if anyone else in the community wants to come in at this point?

Community Member 6: The priority service I think needs to be really promoted more, because I feel I ought to get it, but I don't. Anybody who lives by themselves should be a priority, because they can't be at home and getting water at the same time, when you've paid for it to be delivered through the taps.

TMcK Facilitator: So better signposting and communication around priority for customers?

Community Member 6: That's right, with the Thames Water Priority Services Register, so that more people can register as the problem's going to get worse moving forward.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm aware of time, I wonder if there's any other last contributions on this in terms of the actions we've developed? Anything else you would like to add before we move on to the response? Have we captured everything? Great, lots of nods. Okay Rob, I'll hand back to you, thanks.

CCW Chair: We're going to go back to Thames Water now to see if they're happy with those actions, and answer any of the questions that they've noted down that they feel they can answer now. Martin, we'll come back to you first.

Martin Padley: Thank you everyone for that and thank you for what I thought was a very wide ranging and useful conversation. I'll start by saying about supply interruptions. I was at Epping Forest scrutiny meeting last night talking about this very issue, and what I said there I'll repeat here, we're very sorry that that happened. My heart genuinely goes out to people when they suffer those sorts of supply interruptions, and I think I'd say we learn the true value of water when it's not there, don't we, that's the reality of it.

I'd also say that in terms of customers being in supply, the minutes' thing is a bit sort of misleading, customers were in supply 99.97% of the time, that's the number that perhaps people recognise. But I do take Community Member 6's point, it is awful when it happens, and I was very careful to thank customers yesterday in the area for their support, and also actually thanked the council as well in the area for their support.

Moving on to the questions, more teams. It's more teams and where they live actually, particularly in Thames Valley it's quite hard to get teams who live local in terms of all this. So, what we've done

in that space is we've launched an apprenticeship programme. We're in the first in the industry to do it, nobody else has done it in the water industry. We appointed 21 apprenticeships, I think it was September, we onboarded them, and that is a longer-term plan for that area.

We routinely advertise, we try very, very hard, we've tried people that are not socially advantaged like prison leavers, we've tried a large number of people. I'm very proud in water, 55% of our recruitment in the last year and a half is actually from those sorts of populations, disadvantaged areas. So, we are trying very hard in that area, and as I say, apprenticeships is actually our long-term plan to fix this problem, because it is a problem. And we want them to live locally if I'm honest, they're much more useful to the community if they live locally and represent the community.

Is there any way that we know where the priority area is? I'd see no reason sharing with this group how we prioritise, I've got no problem with that at all, very happy to do that. We do talk to local authorities where we are planning to do work, so we've been talking recently to Chigwell and Loughton, for reasons that Community Member 6 I'm sure will appreciate, and we've also been talking recently to Islington. It's a bit of a dichotomy, because on the one hand, the councils want the mains replaced, on the other hand they don't want the disruption. I'm afraid a lot of these mains run in arterial routes, so it's a "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs" situation, I'm afraid.

In terms of how many kilometres of mains we have, we've got 36,000 kilometres of mains. The problem we've got is actually scaling up, because we did virtually nothing in the prior years between 2015 to 2020, so we're slowly scaling up. Because this is a big job to scale up to replace 1,000 kilometres, so we're doing it over a 10-year period, and it will be 1,000 kilometres in perpetuity, I would suggest.

TMcK Facilitator: Martin, sorry, can I come in there and just say I'm really sorry, I should have probably shared the actions on the screen so that it's maybe a bit more helpful, rather than using your memory. But I can share those if it helps?

Martin Padley: Yeah, by all means please do.

TMcK Facilitator: Shall I put those up for you and then you can come in again? Apologies.

Martin Padley: Put those up. Somebody asked do satellites help with customer side leakage? They do. Satellites found this year 62%, rather than 6%, more customer side leakage, which is really good.

Sharing a graph in terms of mains replacement. I don't see any problem doing that at all.

Do we know more that we're not telling customers? I can tell you for a fact, we're not. I've been in the industry a very, very long time, and I'm very keen on transparency. It is very, very important to me that we're not running MI6, we're running a water company, and people should have confidence in our honesty and transparency.

I'll just read these quickly.

TMcK Facilitator: Shall I read them out for everybody?

Martin Padley: You do it, yeah.

TMcK Facilitator: [A] – Publish concrete leak repair figures beyond percentages with comparisons to past company performance, to understand where we are and where we're heading.

[B] To provide an educational piece explaining the various causes of leaks, so clearly explain

climate related factors, the role of geology, ground movement and other causes out of Thames Water's control.

[C] Communicate the prioritisation order for fixing leaks, so which locations are going to be fixed first and by when? So clear milestones on that. And providing clear information on whether the repair is a temporary measure or a permanent fix. When permanent repairs are expected to be completed, and how decisions regarding repair timelines are determined.

[D] Clarify details about the mains replacement programme. So, what is the total scale of the pipework network compared to what is being fixed, and to clarify if there is a lifecycle cost analysis in place.

[E] Publish a graph, which we've just touched on, displaying pipe replacement figures.

[F] Explore partnerships with employment agencies to increase the number of available repair teams, which we've addressed slightly there.

[G] Provide better signposting to existing support schemes, and review eligibility criteria for those schemes, PSR[9].

Martin Padley: No problem with any of those. I think I've answered most of them as I've gone through. Just two additional points I'd like to make if that's okay. The first one around can we explain this better? I don't know how many people are on Facebook, I'm only on Facebook, I'm not on anything else, but there is an explainer video I've seen doing the rounds that I've seen on leakage, which is quite useful actually if people want to delve into that.

PSR, I think is a very good point, Community Member 6, I think there's more that we need to do there.

David Bird: Do you want me to take that one, Martin, on PSR?

Martin Padley: Okay, David. I'll finish off and then if you wanted to take that.

David Bird: Yeah, sure.

Martin Padley: And then the final thing I'll leave you with is ground movement. Because of the clay that we have in the south east, we see a lot more ground movement than we see around the rest of the country. I've just recently seen the satellite data for the last two years for Manchester, which is the company I was previously in, and London, and the ground movement in Manchester is less than 4 mm, the ground movement in London is more than 12 mm, so it is more than three times worse actually. It is a significant factor. But David, do you want to come in on PSR?

David Bird: I just thought it would be useful to give some figures. Four years ago, we had 365,000 of our customers on the Priority Services Register. December last year it was 695,000, and then where we are currently it's 783,000, and we're forecasting by 2030 to be at 1.2 million. So, I think it's a really important point that's been made, and we are really proactively encouraging customers, and reaching out to make sure that we have got all those customers, for whatever reason, be it financial vulnerability, young children, medical conditions, to ensure that we've captured them. We're working with councils as well to make sure that we're sharing data, so that we can identify these customers. So, it's very key to our customer strategy.

TMcK Facilitator: Thank you, David and Martin. Now I've got the actions up there, just as we've done before, I'd love to just check back in to the community, you've heard the response there, and to review the actions. If there's anything there that you feel has not been captured or accurately captured? If there's anything missing that you want to add some more context to, or want to add to? Please, the floor is yours.

[9] PSR: *Priority Services Register*

Session transcript

Community Member 8: I was just going to say, I went to university in Manchester, so I know how much rain falls up there too. It's really interesting that they have way more rain, so probably they're going to be doing quite well in terms of their water companies up there, because they've got a lot less issues that they need to resolve.

In terms of when the ground is so dry, because of obviously so much tarmac and stuff like that, is there anything that can be done throughout the autumn and winter months in order to prevent that happening through the drier months? I don't know if there is, but maybe those are things in terms of anticipating climate change, bringing these more extreme weather patterns on, so that we've got more drainage. I guess that's what you're saying Manchester has, that it can soak up more rain somehow and still not move. I know you said it's clay and stuff like that down here, which obviously most of the houses have got subsidence and stuff, but is that a thing?

TMcK Facilitator: Community Member 8, that's a really interesting point. Maybe that comes in to the Action B on the educational point about the various causes related to the climate related features, rainfall being one of them. Perhaps that could be captured there if you feel that that's capturing that thought?

Community Member 8: I mean it was just a question. Martin has answered that really.

TMcK Facilitator: Okay. Anyone else like to come in, in terms of the actions? Just for the transcript, are we happy with those actions as they stand in terms of what we've captured as the community? Is there anything we would like to change? I'm seeing lots of nods, so I think that's a yes from you all and you all seem happy with those. Rob, back to you.

CCW Chair: We're moving on to the final section, which is the Q&A section, although we've had a fair few Q&As so far. There's no timer for this section, but obviously Thames Water if you could keep your answers reasonably short and no longer than three minutes, I would say would be about right. We'll start with our first question, and I think Community Member 6 is our first person up.

Community Member 6: Thank you, Rob. We are concerned about Thames Water's financial future and what this could mean for customers, particularly when much of the information is coming through the media, rather than directly from Thames Water. What will you commit to doing to give customers clear, regular updates on Thames Water's financial position, what is within your control, and any changes to services and investment? So, there's three strands to the question, please.

CCW Chair: Who would like to answer that?

Caroline Murdoch: That's me. Hello, Community Member 6, thank you so much for your question. I might answer it in a slightly different order if that's okay. First off, I just thought it might be helpful to explain where we are. You talk about our financial stability and that being a problem. Just to explain what that is. As a business, we have too much debt, and that means rather like if we had a mortgage on our house, we are over 80% mortgaged. We have no shareholders because they walked away due to the financial circumstances we were in, and we have no ability to borrow money on the debt market. And that's important, because customer bills only fund some of what we do. The way that it works in the water industry is bills pay towards day-to-day services and investment, and then borrowing or equity, pay for the longer-term investment, so that you pay for it over a longer time.

At the moment we can't do that, and that's why we need to recapitalise the business, and we're in the middle of that process. The recapitalisation will get that debt down, it will enable us to borrow, we will have new shareholders, and it will put us on a stable financial footing for the future. The really important bit about that, it means that we can then invest sustainably and start to improve

our performance for customers and the environment, and ultimately that's what we're trying to do.

I'm sorry, the question's gone off the page.

TMcK Facilitator: It should be on the chat, Caroline, but if you can't see that, I can put it back up again, no problems. I'll share it again, that's fine.

Caroline Murdoch: No, I've got it.

TMcK Facilitator: You've got it, okay.

Caroline Murdoch: So, what's within our control is that recapitalisation. However, it does require our regulators, our creditors and the government all to agree that that is the right solution for Thames Water. Where we are in the process at the moment is, we're waiting for the new bid to be submitted by our creditors, and then our regulators will consider it. Then they will consult the public on the plan, and then it would require a court process to happen, and that will all take us into the autumn of next year. So, what's within our control is, we are working openly and transparently with regulators and the government to reach that position.

There will be no changes to services on any of this, so although we are financially unstable, that does not mean we haven't been investing. We've invested in fact £2.7bn in the past 18 months in improving our services, and that has been funded by the creditors who are looking to buy the business. So, if it all goes ahead, they will become our new owners, and we will continue to invest, and what you will see for services in investment is that it will continue seamlessly and we will continue to improve. Improvements are coming, the regulators produced a joint report last week which showed Thames Water as being off-track but improving, so we are starting to get better.

In terms of regular updates to customers, we do publish regular information about what's happening, and there's an awful lot of media coverage. It is very difficult to get through a very single-minded narrative about what is a very complicated process. So, our overarching message to customers actually is that there will be no interruption in your services, no matter what happens we will continue to do our day jobs, supplying 3.2 billion litres of clean water every day, taking away 2.4 billion litres of waste every day, and those services will continue.

I do absolutely take your point that it is complicated, and how can we better update customers on exactly what's going on all the time. I think there's probably limited interest in the detail, and I think what customers really want to know is when they turn on their taps and when they flush their loo, does that service continue? But I will certainly think about, well in fact there is already information on our website, and whether maybe we make that more prominent at a time when there's increased focus on the issues.

I hope that helps. I'm really happy to take any subsequent questions. And I've got a terrible echo; can everybody hear me twice? Yeah, it's awful. Sorry.

TMcK Facilitator: It's worse when you're speaking, Caroline, you can hear yourself twice.

Caroline Murdoch: Yeah, it's really hard.

TMcK Facilitator: It's not actually bad this end, but maybe you're hearing a bit more, but you've been fine, thank you.

CCW Chair: Does anyone have a follow-up question on the finances of Thames Water? Thames Water has enough money to take it through to next autumn now, has it?

Caroline Murdoch: That's correct, yes.

Session transcript

CCW Chair: Community Member 6.

Community Member 6: I just want to say a big thank you to Caroline for sharing that information with us. I'm an auditor and I'm also an accountant, but my worry is the public at large, your customer base, probably didn't know the detail in those two minutes of what you said, and I didn't even know that you were in the situation right now, real time.

Caroline Murdoch: That's a very fair point. I suppose I would put it back to you and say where would you want to see this information, because it is on the website. The media like to portray shall we say a less favourable picture of Thames Water, and so don't tend to publish the updates as we're making progress in the same way that we would put it, so I'd be really interested to know where you'd really like to see the updates?

Community Member 6: That's my final point, Caroline. It's the noise coming from Sky News, and to a lesser degree the BBC. It's not doing your customer relationship any good. I want to see it come from Thames Water's Executive Board straight to the customers and tell your customers that you don't want the government to interfere in your business, they need to be running the country, not your company.

Caroline Murdoch: Very strong message there, Community Member 6, thank you.

Community Member 7: I was going to ask about your communication with us. I've learned a lot from this panel direct, but as a customer I don't know anything about you really. So, when you keep referring us to the websites, I find websites really hard and too much detail and clicking through. But you've been sending us emails, it's improved in the past couple of months, emails about the drought, the water, the hosepipe ban. Do that with how you are, this is our monthly update, this is what's happening with us, so we get the emails and we can engage as much or as little as we want. You could do it with the bill, but I know that's a cost, printing and everything, but do engage with your customers, don't put the onus on us to keep finding the information, come direct to us, you've got our contact info.

Caroline Murdoch: I think that's a great point, Community Member 7. The one thing I would say, I think you're quite interested customers, we do sometimes get feedback stop sending this stuff, I'm not so interested. So, I think there's probably a balance to be struck, isn't there?

Community Member 7: You can put at the end "opt in, opt out." I never really engage with the "unsubscribe" and stuff like that, there's always too much action, but you can "check in, check out," or a one-off, "Do you want to hear about this?" and engage that way with us, "Do you want to know about how we're doing on this?" On the annual thing we get our bills come through, "If you want to engage with us, email this." Just do that, ask us how we want to engage.

Caroline Murdoch: Thank you.

Community Member 3: I think one of the things that we talked about in one of the earlier sessions is, there's an awful lot of really good stuff that Thames Water are doing that – picking up on the previous comment – we don't know about. That it is sometimes on the website, but we don't always know the right terminology to use to go and look for it.

One of the things we did suggest is, is there any way that you could either have a ticker on the website like the news tickers, or a little box that scrolls through key facts, which could say things like you're investing £4m in water quality monitoring, you've fixed 11,000 leaks in the last whatever. So just pick out some of those key points that are really reassuring to customers and have them hugely visible on the front page as you go through. Not with massive amounts of detail, but just a statement about what you're doing that can be replaced with a different statement as people stay on the page, so that you've got that complete positive reinforcement happening again and

again and again whenever you land on the page.

Caroline Murdoch: Whilst I can't talk to the technical ability of our website, which is actually something we're working on, which a sort of myth buster fact piece that's customer facing, and that does also refer to some of the things in our recapitalisation, which I know are quite complicated and therefore quite difficult to understand. So, I think again, great suggestion, thank you.

CCW Chair: Yes, Community Member 8.

Community Member 8: It was just a little bit about the whole "the shareholders walked away." I'm assuming that's because they got frustrated because there weren't enough dividends being paid out. Anyway, roughly that's what I'm saying.

The new people who are going to take over, if obviously we've got loads of debt, that's costing us a lot of money, we've got loads of maintenance and repairs and really big challenges ahead, what's the incentive for these people to come on board? And then also, how do you measure that against obviously the cost of investment in the future for doing all these very expensive plans? Is it more like equity? I don't know, I'm just thinking about their motivation because it's almost like they want something different to what we want, which would be different if it was a privatised venture. But when you're looking at a private company, they want to make money, they want to get profit, but we actually want investment, which isn't going to be seen for many years maybe down the future, if ever. So, it's like the goals are almost a bit different. That was my question.

Caroline Murdoch: So, if I can try really hard to answer this simply. The last shareholders walked away, because they could see they would have to invest more money in than they would ever make in terms of return. However, the people who are looking to buy the business at the moment are our debtholders, so they are looking to do something called a debt for equity swap. What they will do is, they will write off a whole load of this money and be repaid with shares in the business. It's in their interest to do that, because the alternative is they could lose everything. Their ultimate plan is in 5 or 10 years' time not to take a dividend, but then to return the business to the open market so that people can buy shares in it. That's when they end up making their money.

But all through that time they have to keep investing. So, the one thing that we can be clear about, I talked about the £2.7bn we've invested in the past 18 months, they will continue to invest, and they have pledged to invest over £20bn. They make their money back right at the end when they sell the business, so they're willing to be patient. In a way, the incentives are aligned in that they will keep investing, and they will deliver improvements for the customers and the environment, and then they can sell the business and make their money back. I have over-simplified hugely, but that's sort of broadly it.

CCW Chair: Can we just be clear on something, because there are two elements in every business to spending, one is the day-to-day spending, and one is the capital or the investment spending, and you were suggesting there was a difference between who paid for that. My understanding is customers end up paying for 90-95% of everything, whether it's capital or day-to-day spending, so just be clear for the members of the panel how that works?

Caroline Murdoch: Yeah, absolutely. The bills that we collect are not enough to fund the investment that we're doing. In fact, in our last annual report we said it was £1.9bn too little, so that's where we borrow. Bills go for day-to-day operation, but we fund the long-term investment with debt or with equity, and that's because it allows those major infrastructure projects to be financed over its life, rather than you and me paying for it today when we're not going to be using it in 80 years' time. So, customer bills pay for day-to-day now, and the debt or the equity pay for the long-term investment. And you're right, eventually customers pay it back, because today

customers are paying the interest on the debt that we've taken out to spread.

CCW Chair: So, it pretty much all ends back at the customer.

Caroline Murdoch: Yeah, eventually, because the customer ends up using the product.

CCW Chair: Honestly, it's not a criticism, I'm just trying to make it clear to everyone. Okay, shall we move on to another question, because I think Community Member 8 is next. Community Member 8.

TMcK Facilitator: I'm just going to share that on the screen for you, Community Member 8.

Community Member 8: Obviously we've touched on some of this with Martin, I think. Thames Water's latest C-MeX score ranks at 16th, and members of the community wanted to understand what companies delivering a better customer experience are doing differently? What have you learned from better performing water companies, and what one or two approaches have you identified and will you commit to adopting over the next 12 months to improve customers' experience? I'd also add it's not necessarily customer experience, but just like efficiency and being run well, whether that's financial, whether it's environmental etc.

David Bird: If I answer that one. Thank you for the question, Community Member 8. My responsibility covers all things to do with customer and transformation. As Caroline mentioned, we're investing massively in our infrastructure, £7m a day every day, but we're also investing heavily in the customer experience and making our operations more efficient, but actually to give a better outcome to customers.

One of the things we've done is launched an initiative called Customer First in the last few months. At a fundamental level, we've renamed our Retail Division that made no sense to our customers in terms of what it was called, to our Customer Division. We've created a new customer leadership team, which I now lead, and that is a far more cross-Thames wide approach to how we make those improvements.

We've got a stated ambition of becoming the easiest water company to do business with. We know that will take time. We were for over a decade 17th in that league table, we moved to 16th at the end of last year, and so far, this year, we've moved to 15th, so we're definitely making progress.

There's a couple of things that I'll give you as examples to really start to make the difference. We've launched a training package called Destination Easy, which is all about how we deliver that for our people. We've trained over 1,500 people on how to better deal with customers, how to make sure that they take ownership, and we're continuing to roll that out into next year.

And then we're trialling a very different way of working. To your point about learning from others, we've not only just looked at other water companies, but we've also spent quite a bit of time with Octopus Energy who are renowned for their service in the energy sector, and we are trialling some different ways of operating.

At the moment if you have an issue with us, we run you by process, so somebody will answer your query, they'll put it into a queue, somebody else will then do the next part of the process, and that can take a long time. The customer satisfaction scores we're getting for that is about 59 or was 12 months ago. We've now been trialling a new way of working that moves our customer satisfaction scores to between 89 and 91 where we're piloting it.

But I think, more importantly, we know that the biggest driver of customer satisfaction is resolution, so have we fixed the issue that you raised with us? What we're now doing is giving our colleagues the ability to own and really case manage any issues that come up, so if you phone in with a problem. We've been trialling this in four different pilots, and our resolution scores have

gone from 50% to 89%, and in one area up to 93%. We are going to roll that out across the business over the next 18 months.

The other thing we're then doing is looking at being far more proactive, so rather than waiting for customers to tell us they've got a problem, we're using AI and data to identify where we think there may be a problem. We've set up a new team that are proactively contacting customers to say either, "We think you may have a customer side leak," or, "We think there's an issue with your account," and working with customers to resolve that before it becomes an issue for them. And again, we're seeing really high customer satisfaction scores and resolution.

This is not an easy journey, because it means we have to completely rethink how we operate, and change a lot of our systems to support that, but from those pilots we now have a coherent plan to change that over the next 18 months to fundamentally shift how we operate.

Hopefully that gives you a sense of 1) we're treating it very seriously; 2) we're spending a lot of money training our people, but also, we're radically rethinking about how we deliver to our customers, and we are going to fundamentally change that over the next 18 months.

CCW Chair: Community Member 8, do you want to come back on any of that?

Community Member 8: Probably because I'm really less focused on wanting to … I think when you've got a problem, dealing with it, being able to speak to somebody and then being able to resolve your problem, is really, really important. I guess my point was, who is doing the best, not just in terms of customer service, but who's got the values, the vision, of how we're going to move forward in terms of the big scale problems? Because honestly, if we have no water for three days because there's a cyber-attack or some other kind of climate change issue, this isn't going to matter.

I feel like sometimes on the wider situation that I viewed, we're very in the detail, and I feel like the strategy of how are we going to solve these really major problems, for me, what are other companies doing on that on a big major impact scale? That is more important to me than customer service, which I appreciate if you've got problems – I live in London I don't have that many – is very important. But I think we're in the nitty-gritty as well, it's like the big issues, that I would really love to see some kind of like forward thinking, joined up visionary expertise, making me feel like it's all going to be okay.

David Bird: Do you want me to answer that now?

CCW Chair: Very, very briefly, because we've got one more question that I want to squeeze in.

David Bird: We have just launched, Community Member 8, our 2055 Vision, where we've looked at a whole range of other countries, organisations. That's a statement, it's not an aspiration, it's we will deliver this in 2055, and that covers those really big topics around climate change, population growth, and how we're going to address that. And then underneath that, there are some quite detailed documents that we work with our regulators on to publish how are we going to deliver on those plans and that vision, and all of those are being currently refreshed as we speak.

CCW Chair: We're going to move on to the final question. David, thank you very much for that answer. Community Member 7, over to you.

Community Member 7: The question I've got is, what will Thames Water focus on to rebuild customers' trust, and how will customers be able to see evidence that it is working?

Caroline Murdoch: Thank you, I'm going to take that one, it's a great question. I guess the first thing I would say is, from my perspective trust is a function of delivery, not a good comms plan.

What Thames Water needs to start doing is delivering for customers and then helping customers to understand the fact that we are making those changes and improvements, because it's not always obvious, is it, and it's very much connected to explaining your bill and how we spend that money.

We do this in a number of ways. We've been doing some marketing for a start, and we started that campaign by talking about what we're planning, so we talked about our biggest upgrade and replacing lots of pipes, and then the next one, we talked about investing in and improving rivers, and we're about to do our next one which is going to talk about what we've actually delivered. So now we're 18 months into this price control period, and we're going to talk about how many pipes we've replaced, we've cleaned 170 kilometres of sewers, we've upgraded our treatment works, we're improving what we're doing.

So those are our outputs, and then we need to talk about the outcomes that they drive. I spoke just recently about the Ofwat Performance Report, which is starting to show green shoots, so we invest, we improve, and then we tell people. What we're really trying to do now is make it local, because it's all very well, I see you there Community Member 7, me telling you we've replaced 100 kilometres of pipes, but actually what have we done in your area, and what is the improvement that results in? So, we've replaced five kilometres of the leakiest mains, and that means there will be fewer bursts and fewer leaks. So that's the bit that we're moving towards.

When will you see evidence? We've said this turnaround will take a decade, but I believe that evidence is starting to be seen, but we need to make sure that you are starting to understand that and hear about it. We also talk to our local MPs, local authorities, local community groups. Martin referred earlier to that Facebook video that's going round, we're doing quite a lot of activity on Facebook and Nextdoor to really try and bring it to local communities, bringing to life exactly what we're doing locally. We call that hyperlocal comms, and we're trying to do more and more of that and roll that out across our catchment.

Community Member 7: Can I say one thing I've personally raised with these social groups is, one of the foundations of trust you could do is, we all move into a house, when you move into a house there's not a basic manual "work with Thames Water this way, that way." I think so much has been lost where we all move in, it's just expectation. There's so much more demand now, there's so much more demand in my area. There's a data centre being proposed, and we're all going, "What about working with Thames Water on this?" you're putting all this responsibility and it's going to have impact.

I just think one foundation for me is to engage with us from the word go, this is how we'd like you to work with us, this helps us, this helps you. Just a basic bible, because everything's an assumption that everybody knows everything, and there's so many children starting out now. I've owned my home for 25 years, but I think there's so much I could learn and start again and be more supportive.

Caroline Murdoch: Yeah, I think that's a great idea. I know Martin Lewis and other customer organisations get all the utilities together, don't they, and try and help everybody with information about how to pay your bill, or how to get support. Yeah, I can certainly look at that.

CCW Chair: We're running up against time. Are there any last comments on that last question from Community Member 7 that anyone wants to make? If not, Clare, is there anything that you need to pick up from that Q&A in terms of actions?

TMcK Facilitator: We've captured some actions as we've gone through. I'm happy to talk through some of them, or whether we've got time for doing that?

CCW Chair: Could you do it in a minute and a half?

Session transcript

TMcK Facilitator: I'll give it a go! In terms of the rebuilding trust point, the first action around that was consulting with customers on how they would like to communicate and engage with Thames Water. And to explore the idea of providing people with an engagement document from the moment you move in, the point that Community Member 7's just raised, new premises for old, and new customers exist there.

In terms of the question around the C-MeX scores and the rankings, there was quite a few actions that we've picked up from here. Top line is the new pilot approach; Thames Water's been trialling the new ways of working where colleagues own and case manage issues end-to-end rather than passing through a queue. Information around the rollout plan and Thames Water's plans to roll out this new approach across the business over the next 18 months. So, an action around that.

And then we talked about the 2055 Vision. An action around that would be to provide a new proactive team that regularly contacts customers when data and AI signals may suggest an issue. That might be a leak or whatever the issue is with the customer's account. So, the team works with customers to resolve issues before they become a problem.

And then in terms of the last one, which is around the financial future and what it could mean for customers, and committing to customers to give them clear and regular updates. There were two or three actions around that. Providing clear company financial information across communication channels, and in an easy to access location. Signposting key facts and milestones on company resources, making it upfront on the website. And the conversation we had about the recapitalisation programme, obviously it's needed to have approval, but some actions around working on providing information on that for customers.

That was the top line, did I manage to get through it all on time? Yes, 8 o'clock, we're there!

CCW Chair: Well done. Obviously, all those actions have been captured for the follow-up action plan. In terms of next steps, a summary report, fully anonymised transcript, and full list of actions, are going to be published in the next seven days, by Friday 13th.

Before publication, session members will have the opportunity to request changes, such as redactions of personal information, that sort of thing, or anything confidential that Thames Water might have accidentally said that they don't want published. Thames Water must publish its action plan within 28 working days, by Monday 14th December, setting out how it will deliver against the agreed actions. CCW will publish this on its website.

Once the action plan is published, community members will be sent a link and a short survey asking whether the plan accurately reflects what was agreed, and whether it was enough to address the concerns raised, and you'll have 10 days to respond to that. CCW will then track progress against the action plan through the Water Voice process. This process is designed to make sure tonight leads to follow-through, not just discussion.

Finally, I just want to thank all the community members for your time this evening, the thought and challenges you've brought to tonight's session, and to Tessa, Martin, David and Caroline from Thames Water for engaging so well with the process. It's your input as community members that give these sessions their purpose and the accountability. Thank you everyone, and good evening, enjoy the rest of your evening.

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