



WONDERFUL ON TAP



Your water, your say – Written record

Monday, 17 April 2023

16.00-18.00

This is a written record of the 'Your water, your say' session held by Severn Trent on Monday, 17 April 2023.

The session was independently chaired by **Kevin Johnson**, jointly appointed by Ofwat and the Consumer Council for Water.

The representatives attending from Severn Trent were:

Christine Hodgson	Chair
Liv Garfield	Chief Executive
Jude Burditt	Director of Customer Solutions
Shane Anderson	Director of Strategy and Regulation

Kevin Johnson welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave short introduction on proceedings, including notifying all present that the session was being recorded solely for the purposes of producing a written record and that the recording would be subsequently deleted once he, as the Independent Chair, had agreed it.

The representatives from Severn Trent delivered a brief presentation on the company's developing plans for the next five years and its long-term delivery strategy. This represents an overview of the company's developing proposals at this point in time, while customer consultation is still taking place and before confirmation of the company's final investment plan, and therefore should not be considered final. Please see the disclaimer on forward looking statements included at the end of the written record and in the presentation.

Kevin Johnson then invited questions from attendees; these questions are detailed below, alongside further questions that were received prior to or within 24 hours after the session, together with the responses from the Severn Trent representatives.

Questions and responses

- 1. I live in a rural area classed as having very hard water, which leads to a lot of significant issues. For instance, I recently bought a new kettle and within one day, it had completely scaled up and my first washing machine in the home broke within a few months of moving in. I wonder whether Severn Trent has anything in its plan to improve the water quality, to make it a bit easier to deal with? And if not, are there any plans in place or any support available to customers to deal with it themselves in their homes?**

Water hardness is a problem for some of our customers and there's a real balance in terms of how we treat that without putting too many chemicals into the system. In terms of our plans, we are of course always trying to improve water quality, and we do have specific support for target areas where there are real challenges; those will be scheduled into our plan for this next asset management period (AMP) (2025-2030).

One of the challenges with factoring in water hardness investment is that, unlike some other water companies, Severn Trent does not have a statutory requirement that water hardness investment must be funded through the price review. As we do not have any such requirement, we have to rely on customer engagement with regards to investment priorities. To date, treating water hardness has not come across as high a priority as other areas such as rivers, so there are no specific targets in the plan at present, but we hear your feedback and can take another look at it.

The customer was asked to provide their details so a water quality test could be undertaken.

- 2. Looking at your potential plans, you have a proposed increase of £20 per year. To me, that doesn't seem enough. It's a small amount considering how everything else has gone up and for you to be able to achieve these important things – rivers, drinking water – and a £20 per year increase really is not much.**

When we're developing the investment programme, we do look at a range of factors, including tracking and monitoring a lot of lead indicators for affordability – what customers are saying they are finding unaffordable. And that is rising at the moment, so we've got to balance the desire for big investments in the environment which we're delivering – as Liv talked about, there will be a three-fold increase on

our waste environmental programme – but we do have a lot of customers struggling.

Already today, 6% of customers are in what we define as ‘water poverty’ and our affordability programme helps those customers, but as we’re seeing, this number is going to increase over time so we need to make sure we balance the needs of customers who want more investment with those who are struggling with their bill today and, of course, those who are just about managing. We are trying to strike the right balance.

This is a draft plan – we can look at other opportunities and we’ll listen to the feedback today; if there’s a desire for more investment in certain areas, we might look to scale that up.

- 3. I’ve got a water meter and I’m trying to use less water to reduce my bill. But although I am a single person living on my own, my bill is now being changed to a family bill. Because of that, my water meter is now redundant – no matter how much I save or don’t save, my bill is no different from, I assume, an average family of 1-2. Is there a way of getting a true bill detailing what water I actually use, so if there is a saving that I make, it is actually reflected in the bill itself?**

We are going to be rolling out more smart meters, but the other thing we are looking at doing, starting with a small trial before broadening it out, is called a rising block tariff, so you would have quite a discounted bill for low levels of consumption – and we’re just working out what that is – then each block of water used is progressively more expensive. Something like that would clearly benefit you, as you would get big savings for keeping your consumption low. But we can’t introduce it in one go, we’ve got to apply it slowly so we learn.

The important thing is that you shouldn’t be paying a tariff for a family, you should be paying a tariff for a single person, so my ask is that you let us have your details via CCW, and we can investigate why that might be the case.

- 4. In CCW’s Annual Customer Complaints Report for 2021/22, Severn Trent’s complaints handling performance was worse than average compared to other companies. Severn Trent was also 8th out of 17 companies in Ofwat’s Customer Experience measure in the same year. How will Severn Trent’s business plan deliver improvements that will see that performance improve?**

We know that right now the performance we’ve had in the customer space, whilst not terrible, it’s pretty average and nowhere near represents our ambitions in terms of customer service. We’ve given a commitment to CCW, we’ve talked to

Ofwat and, most importantly, we've given a commitment to our customers. In this next AMP and as we lead up to it, we are really going to focus on customer experience – we really want to be top performer in relation to customer complaints and complaints handling. We're going to try and emulate the highest performers from the UKCSI and we've been talking to UK Power Networks about that. And of course, the tricky but really important customer measure Ofwat has, C-MeX, is being reworked and we are very much part of the working group to make sure we are in a good position to deliver exactly what our customers want.

Whilst our performance isn't terrible and the vast majority of our customers do not need to contact us, we know that some of the complaints our customers make are about the long and protracted hand-offs and we are going to sort that out.

Already we've reduced complaints by a significant percentage in this last year and we're really happy about that. Going forward, we need to make sure we are there when our customers need us, so we've scaled up our operations to ensure people can get hold of us. We've increased the training in terms of the resources we've got to make sure we can deliver more 'right first time' answers to our questions. And probably, most critically, in terms of those issues that stretch across our complex organisation, we need to make sure we've got really good data to understand where the problem lies, who has ownership for it and how it can be fixed. We are up and running with those activities now and we genuinely think that our customers who have experienced a problem in the past will see a vast improvement in the future.

- 5. With regard to affordability, and in particular your social tariff, please could you explain how many of your customers are deemed to be in 'water poverty', how many of those are presently supported by the social tariff known as BDS ['Big Difference Scheme'] and how that support is currently funded, i.e. what level of customers subsidise it and how much of it is subsidised by the company itself? Also, what changes do you see to the provision of that funding over the five year period from 2025-2030 so that more customers struggling to pay can be helped?**

The research says that roughly 6% of our customer base is in water poverty, so that's around 300,000 customers, and our affordability support schemes support 300,000 customers, roughly 200,000 through our social tariff and the rest through our own schemes including our Trust Fund, which we pay for through profits, along with payment matching and payment breaks.

In terms of how the social tariff might change in the future, our Expert Challenge Panel has been helping to challenge the design of this and we've also been doing

some co-creation sessions with our customers to gather their views on how this could change, for example, we held a session recently where our customers were suggesting that rather than offering the largest discount of 90%, why wouldn't we offer something a bit smaller but help more customers. Across the other water companies, the average is about 50% discount, whereas ours is around 80% on average. As such we are thinking about whether we should reduce some of the bandings, so we can help more customers given we are facing into a cost-of-living crisis at the moment.

The design is therefore still being worked upon, including with our Expert Challenge Panel, and we also welcome further customer perspectives on how it could work; this is one area in particular where we want to co-design and co-create with customers.

- 6a. As part of the presentation, it showed bills increasing by approximately £20 per year, before the impact of inflation, from 2025, and someone commented that that didn't seem very much considering how many the challenges you have to face. Could you explain how you see that increasing during the period from 2025-2030, because my understanding is that it might rise by around £20 per year each year during that period, so we could have a significant increase by the end of that period – is that correct?**

Sorry if we weren't clear, it is £20 per year, every year over the five-year period – not doing a large increase in a single year, trying to spread it over the five-year period. This is a function of investment and if there are different requirements or requirements change then this drives the impact.

- 6b. So bills at the end of the period would be approximately £100 more than they are now? And then in addition, inflation will have an effect. I just wanted to make this point so that people who did feel this is a relatively modest amount given the amount of investment that's required will see its plans to grow during the period quite significantly.**

That's correct.

- 7. Affinity Water are trialling a new pricing plan by which water pricing is scalable, so if you buy a smaller block of water, the unit price of that block of water will be a lower price than if you're using a larger block of water, so not only do you get the advantage of using less water but you also get charged less for that water.**

To set the block tariffs, we need to know how many people are in each household and that information isn't publicly available. Can we use smart meter data for example to try and understand that?

It came out really strongly in our affordability research that people were concerned about rising block tariffs because it impacts their budgeting processes, so again we need to understand how customers respond to this, whether it could create an affordability trap for example. So, that's why we are moving reasonably slowly so we can make sure we design it appropriately.

8. How much financial support in total (£) do you propose to make available to customers struggling to afford their water bills between 2025-2030, and how much or what percentage of financial support will be funded from shareholders' profits?

The key point is that we do not want any customer to worry about their bill. The amount we have to contribute, whether that is through the cross-subsidy or through our own contributions, is unknown at the moment as we don't know what the future is looking like.

Our own forecasts say we need to help around 500,000 people. As it stands today the cross-subsidy is about £12 – that will need to be slightly higher. We are also providing millions of pounds through our Community Fund and our Trust Fund, so we are not envisaging any particular change there.

So we think there will be a small uplift to the social tariff cross subsidy as it stands today, with potential re-design following the co-creation to help more customers through a slightly lower discount, but this will still be sector-leading.

It's difficult to pinpoint a number, but what we want to stand behind is that no customer should have to worry about their bill – whether that's through subsidised bills, income maximisation on the website or water efficiency advice, we need to work out what the right solution is.

9. In the current cost-of-living crisis, many customers are struggling to pay but may not necessarily qualify for the social tariffs or affordability support that's on offer. So how will Severn Trent's plans ensure that the company identifies and offers assistance to those customers?

The qualifying criteria for our social tariff is the household income, but this is by no means the only support that we give. What we're looking to do, going forward, is give an affordability pledge to make sure that anybody who needs some help with

affordability will be confident that as an organisation we will be able to give that support.

It will take many forms: our social tariff, schemes such as WaterSure, which works across the sector to make sure bills are capped for those meeting certain criteria, and we'll be looking at water-saving advice, debt advice, and signposting to benefits if that's required. There is a whole range of support that we're giving and the pledge we would like to make going forward, is that if people need us to help them with making their bill more affordable, we will find a way to help them. It may not be the social tariff, as we will reserve that for those people in the greatest need, but there is a whole range of support that we can offer and we will be very happy to work with people on that.

Even this year alone, we have increased the income threshold for eligibility for the social tariff – it is quite clear that things have changed; this is a live conversation in the cost-of-living situation. We actually realised that people earning slightly more than that were still struggling, so we moved up the level to be able to help more customers and that's our commitment – if needed, we will do that again. We are keeping a very close eye on the wider impact of the market across the piece, see how the UK feels and we'll take the right judgment calls.

10. Why is there so much leakage 30 years after privatisation?

Fundamentally there is less leakage now than there has ever been before. We know that people find this a totemic issue and that's why we have delivered our leakage target every year but one in the last 12 years and we have just delivered it again for this year.

We know our customers want us to do three things really well:

- (1) They want us to fix any leak they raise really quickly and actually we have brought down, by about a third, the time it takes to fix a leak over the last two or three years;
- (2) even on private-side leaks, they want more help, more advice, more speedy action if it's a shared leak and we're really leaning into helping on those private-side leaks – that's about a third of all leakage, not actually controlled by us as it's on customer-owned pipes; and
- (3) they want bold targets from a company which is meant to be a leader in the sector, they want us to go much quicker than government targets and, as mentioned earlier, we want to be five years ahead of the government targets, and

they want us to be much quicker than the rest of the sector in terms of speed of leak reduction.

We've just spent a lot of money, tens of millions of pounds, putting in around 40,000 acoustic loggers to find leaks quickly and we are using artificial intelligence (AI) data, satellite data and every form of technology to identify and pinpoint those leaks as quickly as possible.

So it is actually better than ever before and the answer for the next price review is to do even more heavy investment, which is why we are so passionate about the mains relay investment – to double the amount of pipes we relay. To give you one stat – every five years, we relay the same length of pipes that go from John O'Groats right the way down to Lands End, so we do relay a massive amount of pipework every five years, but we want to do twice as much of that in the next five years.

11. What is Severn Trent's target date for ending raw sewage discharges into waterways and water bodies?

We have made two commitments in terms of targets.

Firstly, focusing on river quality, we want to make sure that not one part of our sewer overflows or assets causes ecological harm by 2030. This is considerably ahead of many others in the sector and we don't know of any company globally with a more aggressive target.

Secondly, we have openly said that whilst the government has given a 2050 target, in terms of getting down to no more than 10 activations per year from storm overflows, we want to go much quicker than that. We have openly written to the government and said we'd like to go maybe even 10 years earlier than that and we're working to make sure that we can go as fast as possible, but certainly 5-10 years ahead of government target on that particular measure.

There isn't a date as yet for zero activations of storm overflows, and that's because we need to see how innovation plays out. The costs for going to zero right now would be prohibitive, which is also what government and NGOs' feedback is at the moment. We stand ready to go faster and quicker should those targets become more aggressive.

For the year just finished, we actually ended on an average of 18.4 activations, which is below the 2025 target of 20, but we know there is still more to do and we promise we get it – we will do more, faster, quicker.

- 12. Since 2010 Severn Trent has paid out an average of £223 million to its shareholders each year. In December 2021, Severn Trent was fined £1.5 million by the Environment Agency for illegal sewage discharges in Worcestershire. That's a very small proportion of its profits. So, what I would like to know, going forward, is how you intend to tie your environmental performance to the shareholder dividends; how are you going to tie your environmental performance to what you give out to shareholders?**

We invest typically 4-5 times as much each and every year as we pay out in dividends. So whilst the dividend number sounds large, actually when you look at the size of the company and the amount of investment, and we do need those same investors to actually provide us with the equity to do the scale investment programme for the future, typically 4-5 times more investment every year than dividend payments.

But we understand the energy that says why should we have a pollution, a pollution bad enough for the Environment Agency to prosecute us, and that it is unacceptable. It is true – we should not have any pollutions in any year that are bad enough that the Environment Agency has to prosecute us. These are called *serious pollutions* and we've been really open that it's not acceptable and we're working hard to make sure we don't have any.

Whilst we have not yet publicly reported this, we are pleased to share that our serious pollutions performance is dramatically better during the year just finished than the year before and we are actually 'green' on that measure for the Environment Agency. So, whilst it's not zero yet – it's one this year – it is again right on track to getting ourselves to a position of strength which is that we want to be seen as a leading environmental company again. We've been named by the Environment Agency as the leading company for the last few years and we want to maintain that.

But we hear what you're saying – what you're asking for is a considerable effort on two parts:

(1) In our next five-year plan, make sure we have a really large percentage reduction in pollutions and that we get to zero as quickly as possible. We were debating that on Friday as a senior team and we are absolutely going to make that a cornerstone of our plan; and

(2) secondly, make sure it's fair that our environmental performance is a trigger for whatever happens in terms of investor payments but also more importantly in terms of activities. Ofwat actually has just very recently made a change to how

they look at dividends and the performance a company has to have in order to be able to make dividend payments, and we support their plans because it is a balanced view across the piece of your environment track record, of your performance for customers and that all feeds into it. We were one of the first companies out of the block saying we understand the need for that and we support it, so yes, we are in the same place – maybe not on every last detail – but we hear and acknowledge and support the ambition you are asking for.

- 13. Severn Trent has provided quite a substantial amount of funding as part of its Great Big Nature Boost scheme to the Canal and River Trust as a delivery partner and that's covered a wide range of benefits, from tackling invasive species to improving some of our inland waterways. This provides a great benefit across the supply area for your customers and the environments that you serve. What is going to be the scale of external investment to organisations such as the Canal and River Trust, for the next AMP period where you can realise a lot of the benefits by offsetting your own environmental impacts by investing in other organisations that deliver benefits on your behalf?**

The investment programme is going to be three times as large on environmental matters. One of the big questions, quite rightly, is, 'Are you sure you can deliver a three-times step up in investment?'. And one of the things we've been saying quite openly is, 'Yes, we are really confident in the deliverability' and one of the key reasons why we're confident is because of a wide partner range of organisations, such as the Canal and River Trust. We don't have to do all the work ourselves – where there is an organisation that is better placed, more capable and we're confident can give us firm commitments with measurement that they can deliver the environmental impacts we want, then we'd love to give more work their way. In an ideal world, we'd like to see a doubling of the investment through that route; we don't think it'll quite be a trebling based on our analysis of the partners who probably couldn't step up to that level. But we would love to see a doubling of investment of strong ecological and environmental improvements delivered by partnership organisations in exactly that manner.

- 14. Over the last year, I have moved from an urban area to a rural area. My question is around the differential in resilience for those two groups of customers, both in terms of response and recovery and in terms of longer-term redundancy. Also, one of the things I've noted is just how painful and inconvenient roadworks and road diversions, whoever causes them, are in a rural setting.**

Roadworks *are* painful and we know we are not good enough at it. It's one of the areas that we really want to get after in the next five years, to really mull over what could be a bold target that would be an extra bespoke measure to really understand and lead the way on how you limit the amount of elapsed time on roadworks. How do you create a different experience? We get it, roadworks is probably the single biggest customer feedback we receive.

In terms of the distinct issue between city centres versus countryside, water and waste resilience are quite different.

On water resilience, our performance in city centres is outstanding and actually, historically, we have struggled a little bit more with rural locations in terms of supply interruptions. The answer to that is a mixture of two things – continuing to grow the size of our Network Response Team, which is like the blue light tankers who come in and sort out and basically keep small works on whilst we fix the burst pipe or whatever is the issue that is stopping water directly flowing through our system. So we know that when you look at the latest requirements coming through from the Drinking Water Inspectorate, they're basically saying we've got to treble our ability in terms of the number of customers we can provide bottled water to, or keep on supply, over the course of the next few years and part of that is going to be, ideally, an increase in that blue light response team – more tankers, more people, more 24/7 cover to really help, in particular, the rural areas.

For waste resilience, it's different again. We can see that urban-wise, heavy rainfall is causing a much bigger climate change dilemma for the future and you're not seeing that as much in the countryside, because you've still got green spaces. So, we can see actually that the waste investment spend in terms of the big 'hot topic' is around capturing that rainwater in city centres and we're going to see way more investment actually going into urban locations to capture rainfall. We need to learn more from what we can do and have done successfully in more rural locations and take that learning in. Mansfield, where we are spending the best part of £100 million, doing an urban demonstrator project, is our blueprint to really understand and get ourselves lined up for the future.

Rural and urban resilience is a great question. One of the things we are running a project on is looking at where are the worst served customers – how do you identify who is unlucky, because in a generically brilliant set of service stats, that doesn't mean everyone is having a wonderful time, and we've set up a new detailed focus on 'worst served'. It's a bit of a mixture between rural and urban, depending on the particular measure.

- 15. Potholes are currently a problem and I've noticed that some are where contractors have previously dug up and re-laid sections of the roads. Are the contractors that Severn Trent uses monitored and are there any follow up checks?**

Yes, they are monitored and yes, there are follow up checks. We have independent in-house auditors ourselves that keep an eye on this, so effectively, when a road has been reinstated, then we would keep an eye on that and would monitor it. Equally, if anybody ever sees something that is related to our assets that hasn't been done well enough, we would always urge them to flag it straight to the Chief Executive, which is why she makes her email address readily available for all customers: liv.garfield@severntrent.co.uk.

Typically our performance is actually quite good – once we've done reinstatements, the quality holds. The feedback for us sometimes is about whether we do the reinstatement the same day or the day after and that delay on roadworks is typically where we get the negativity. It's not the quality of work, it's the slight time delay between the actual core issue being fixed and full road reinstatement and the road being open again. That is why we are proposing an incentive on time doing roadworks.

- 16. We've seen significant numbers of people enjoying getting out on the water for their health and wellbeing. We've seen huge concerns around impacts of sewage discharges on public health. So, I'd like to ask, how are you prioritising reductions of sewage discharges at popular recreational locations?**

The way we are prioritising is by following government advice, because it is very tricky for us to choose which one is the 'right location' or not, when it is such a high-profile topic and there is very clear government guidance that we first will follow.

There are three areas that we've got to focus on for the Storm Overflow Reduction Plan: SSSI sites; high amenity value; and eutrophic rivers.

And in addition to that, we are also really clear that we wanted to take a couple of really big bathing locations in our region and actually invest scale cash to get a sense of what work needs to be done, to understand the costs and be able to put it out to customers and say that for this amount of money, we can actually make this 20-30km stretch of river now bathing quality. And so, in addition to all the work we did in the last five years, we are doing an extra investment programme, we went out and got some money from our investors plus some money agreed by the

regulator and in both Ludlow and in Leamington, and along the stretches of those rivers, we are actually going live with about 60km of really good improvements to create bathing quality rivers, the first locations in the UK that whilst not formally designated bathing rivers, have the quality of river that is.

What's been interesting from the customer research undertaken in the last few months so far, and this has been with thousands of customers, is that actually when faced with the costs, customers haven't prioritised it as much as some of the other activities. So, we think that people definitely want to see us do more improvement on rivers, but don't currently support us going as far as bathing quality standard. They want to see us getting to ecologically good status, but that is different to bathing quality standard. That has been quite interesting and slightly different to how we thought that might have played out, but that is the feedback so far. So good if you've got different views, please post those views in the chat and make sure your voice is heard.

- 17. Improving the quality of rivers and reducing the number of outflows into rivers by 2030 to zero, but your storm overflows target is for 2040. What happens in the 10 years after 2030? I can't believe that storm overflows won't affect rivers in some way. Also, on the last point on bathing quality rivers as opposed to environmental improvements, I think most people don't rate it as important because often bathing within rivers creates more environmental damage than a lot of other things.**

If you look at the reasons for rivers not achieving ecologically good status now, which is the global measure and European measure for river quality, then today, in our region, our assets (and that includes storm overflows) represent less than 16% of the reasons rivers don't meet ecologically good status. About 3.5% is due to storm overflows and the remaining, say, 12% is actually assets in terms of compliant effluent but where effectively it still puts a contributory contaminant into that river. By 2030, we are saying that there will be no reason for a river to not meet ecologically good status in our region due to us, so whether that's due to a storm overflow or due to an asset, they will not be stopping the river being ecologically good. That doesn't mean we don't want to go even further, and we don't want interim targets on storm overflow activations, of course we do – it's a massively passionate topic. There are a series of interim targets. Target number one was, by 2025, to have fewer than 20 activations per year on average and we have actually hit that already, but we want to keep hitting that for the next couple of years and push further. By 2030, what we are likely to go with is something like an average of 15, something like that, or an average number again that keeps

bringing it down. We then have the government target which they've currently said is 2050, which is no individual storm overflow having more than 10 activations regardless of how extreme the weather is, and bearing in mind climate change will make things a lot trickier between now and then, and we've said, that is the back-stop government target – we will categorically want to go quicker than that, which is why we have said previously we'd love it to be 2040, a whole decade earlier.

But you are right, we need to make sure we improve each and every year on the amount of times the storm overflows activate, on the amount of flow that goes into those activations and on how long those activations last for – and that is our intention, to create a plan that listens to the feedback from the public and does that. That is the public desire and that is our definite intention.

It is slightly different to the maths in terms of the evidence on the impact – it is a lot lower than the public feeling, but we know the public feeling is as important as the evidence the Environment Agency is providing.

On Friday afternoon, Defra published their consultation on river quality monitors so over the next 10 years we will be installing monitors within 500 metres upstream and downstream of every one of our assets, including the storm overflows. They'll be monitoring ammonia levels, because they can't monitor phosphates, and so you'll be able to get the evidence as well to show that actually when the river is in high flow, the storm overflow is only activating after it has gone through the storm tank, which is effectively primary treatment and there isn't any environmental impact on the river, and you'll have the monitors to either prove or disprove those points.

- 18. It was mentioned that by 2030, Severn Trent will have to reduce abstractions by 140 million litres per day. But with population growth, the amount needed is likely to be a lot more than that. How much more? And secondly, what is the action you're going to take because at the moment, I've worked out that leakage reduction delivers 63 million litres per day but there's a lot of gap between that and what you're going to need?**

Impressive maths! For leakage reduction we had it down as 62 million litres per day and you've got 63 million litres per day. In terms of closing the gap, you're right, there's population growth and losing abstraction licences because of the new rules. Roughly half is from leakage and demand reduction and the other half is from new capacity. We have some quite strong targets from government both on per capita consumption, getting down to 110 litres per person, and also business demand. So, we need to do a lot more in this space, which is why we are rolling

out smart meters, looking at trials of rising block tariffs and we also need to do a lot more on business customers. MOSL has reviewed our draft Water Resource Management Plan and has said we are not doing enough with non-household customers and, in particular, reducing demand there. So, we're going to be writing to Ofwat in that regard, updating our Water Resources Management Plan and proposing that some of our existing measures are broadened to include both household customers and non-household customers, so we can roll out smart meters there, find leaks and offer solutions to reduce demand.

We are having to go for a mix of solutions – it is risky to just rely on demand reduction. We need a balanced approach and of course every five years we produce the Water Resources Management Plan and we'll take stock and re-consider the evidence.

- 19. I represent the Friends of Bilbrook, a community conservation group based in South Staffordshire. We carry out river restoration projects, regular river surveys and water quality monitoring of the brook, which is part of the Upper Trent Valley's catchment. We also have Codsall Sewage Treatment Works which discharges sewage into the brook as well. For the last 10 years, we've been supported by an organisation called Waterside Care, which was part of Keep Britain Tidy, however Severn Trent has recently withdrawn funding from this organisation, and it just baffles me as to why they've done that. There's probably over 100 Waterside Care groups within the West Midlands region and they have trained, equipped and supported us in helping to improve the water quality of the brook. I see now funding available for the Community Fund and this skills training which, to me, seems to be a PR stunt to make Severn Trent look good rather than help us, people like me, who are actually making a difference improving the water quality for where we are. I have asked for support for another project which is coming online soon but further down the brook, and I've heard nothing back from anybody I've emailed about helping us out and I just don't understand why groups like mine and all the other Waterside Care groups have now been left to fend for ourselves.**

One of things we took a call on a while ago, is that it is very tricky for us to sit centrally and to work out where the money should go, because we could make the wrong call. And so, we set up a Community Fund Panel – we've done that for the River Fund as well – and effectively customers choose which causes they want supported and which causes they don't want supported.

We will happily get the details of the particular situation and have a look into it, but I can't make any promises as we don't get a vote – we can't direct the causes.

Definitely not a PR stunt, it's the opposite! If it was a PR stunt, we would own control of where all the budgets go and choose the ones that would make us look the best.

We took a view that we run a company that is a monopoly and our customers have got to have the chance to comment and drive it, and that's why we have these panels, made up of customers that choose which projects to support, so we genuinely don't know what made them decide not to look after and sponsor Waterside Care.

We will look at it and come back to you directly to at least give you more clarity and also to help, we'll make sure that the person who runs the Community Fund Panel, an independent customer, understands the upset around it.

We are the only company in the Midlands to spend 1% of our profits on charities and good causes, so we are unique. If you look at the Midlands, it's one of the worst regions in the nation for getting charitable contributions because hardly any large companies are headquartered here. We know that the 250 charities and causes a year that we help massively appreciate the cash; it's frustrating in this circumstance that it's not helped you guys out, but we will follow up afterwards with you once we've got more details on it. We hope that gives you clarity as to how the Community Fund works.

- 20a. The company has said that we need to cut down on water usage to make the resource last longer. In Japan, when you wash your hands and pull the plug on the basin and away goes the wastewater, it doesn't go straight into the disposal system. It goes into a storage tank that feeds it into the sanitaryware when you flush the toilet. Does the company do any liaison with building developers for looking ahead, talking of 2030, 2040, 2050 – we need to be installing the technology now. It's the same as nuclear power – they should have built the power stations years ago. We've got an energy shortage now that we're suffering from. We need to be working faster and smarter with the technology that's already in existence in other parts of the world.**

We would absolutely love to have more grey water recycled. There are lots of things about the Japan water set up that are great – the bill isn't great, quite pricey – but there are some brilliant things. They have got amazing technology, they do fantastic mains renewal – they literally re-lay their estate the entire time – and as you said, they've got some really good grey water recycling.

We work really closely with developers across our region and we have a great relationship with them and one of the ways that we try and incentivise them to do

great things for reducing water consumption is to offer them environmental discounts. They can get a really significant discount on the price that we charge them to connect to our network and we approach this discussion with all housing developers, whether that's an extension on a small house or a whole new housing estate. We encourage them to come up with schemes that we can support with, to try and reduce per capita consumption by a really significant amount. We look at hardware for that and all sorts of advice we can give them. It doesn't always work, it isn't always what developers want to do, but it is something that we are very motivated to try and encourage.

We are actually putting into our plan for next time around a particular bespoke initiative around how do we get more grey water recycling incentivised. So, we agree, we need to get more creative in this space and particularly with corporate customers. We're working through what could that incentive look like, to discuss with the regulator.

- 20b. There's a couple of developments close to where I live and the developers, rather than leave what we'd consider a copious green area for the rainfall to permeate through into the aquifers, so Severn Trent can supply it as fresh water, they excavate inundation ponds, store the rainwater in there and then release it into your culverts later on. So they are trying to stop the flooding but they don't stop the problem.**

We need to take the learnings from the urban demonstration project at Mansfield, which is where Christine is taking the Board this week to show them that there is a different approach you can take to rainwater, but you have to take a total catchment approach across an entire urban town.

- 21. Will you be taking the resource of storm water through treatment, to allow the majority of that storm water to be reused rather than it go to the rivers or waste treatment works?**

We've just actually got quite an exciting scheme to be done in the next couple of years – in a location called Packington. What we are going to do is not just take the storm water, but final effluent. It's going to be treated it to an exceptionally high level and then we're going to recycle it as a water source. We'll follow up afterwards to give you a few more details on it but it's a really exciting first mover. We know this has got to be the long-term answer, we don't just treat and put straight into the river, but actually we treat and recycle, which is exactly what they do in water scarce areas such as Singapore.

- 22. Executive and senior management remuneration, in cash terms, is trivial compared with the resources of an organisation such as Severn Trent has, but it does have a public face because we, the customers, like to feel that someone is taking some personal responsibility for the failures of the organisation. To what extent has the salary and bonuses of the Severn Trent CEO and other Board Executives been curtailed as a result of failures to achieve published targets for environmental damage including sewage discharges.**

It is certainly not a trivial topic and it's one that we take incredibly seriously. For the Executive pay at Severn Trent, around 75% of it is linked to performance and so when we talk about performance, we talk about whether or not we're hitting the commitments that we've made to our customers, what we're doing on the environment and how we are treating our employees. All of those things get taken into account and so there are very specific stretching targets, which if they're not met, directly impact the pay of our executives.

The good news is, and one of the reasons why the pay of our executives has been very good in recent years, is actually because as judged by Ofwat and by the Environment Agency, Severn Trent is a leading company in the way that it's hitting its customer commitments and its environmental performance, as referred to earlier.

In all of the targets that we set as a remuneration committee, we make sure everything is as quantifiable and as tangible as possible and everything we do is independently assured.

- 23. A percentage of Severn Trent's supply flows down the River Severn from Mid-Wales. I'm a stakeholder member of the Clywedog Dam Liaison Group. Would it be possible please for Severn Trent to host and explore benign developments of Severn Valley River flow alongside their more narrow and often contentious focus on headwater reservoir storage, this to promote parity in partnership with risk management between drought and flood risk. Whilst headwater reservoirs can be effective, there's tacit acceptance now that headwater dams, when overspilling with their rivers out of control, increase flood risk to local communities.**

We can certainly convene a meeting to discuss this issue further.

- 24. I'm the Chair of a Local Neighbourhood Forum, which covers three villages in north-west Nottinghamshire, not far from Mansfield. We're very interested in the quality of our environment, and particularly our streams, and we got**

concerned during the pandemic because of sewage discharges into a brook which we thought may be contaminated with COVID and we had some correspondence with Severn Trent on that. We were impressed by the Great Big Nature Boost and tried to volunteer for that as we were already planting trees here, but we were only invited to Birmingham, which was 65 miles away, to plant trees so that didn't work out. We are very impressed by the five River Pledges, although it's been said the industry hasn't managed to keep pace. We're interested in Get River Positive and tried to join a local River Forum which we were told about and support efforts, but we haven't heard anything on that. I had a message after I mentioned this on Tap Chat from a Senior River Ranger, who said you're not taking on volunteers at this stage and referred us to the Trent Rivers Trust, but we're actually outside their catchment. Over three years we've heard a lot of publicity about stuff going on and we tried to make contact. We weren't asking for money, we just wanted to participate and support environmental efforts by Severn Trent but we found it actually quite difficult. My question is, how could you encourage us to connect more in future and participate more effectively in future in the efforts you've been describing today in terms of the environment?

Let's pick this up afterwards as certainly we are very keen for people who want to participate. We're not aware of the specifics as to why that's been more difficult than it should be, but we will definitely pick it up offline.

Supplementary questions and answers

The following questions were not answered at the event, but were raised in writing either with the Consumer Council for Water, or via the 'chat' function during the session itself.

25. Regarding sewage overflows:

- **Do permanent house boat moorings nearby influence priority for improvement?**
- **How you will prevent issues with continuous discharge from sewage works working at max flow for longer as storage is emptied and issue of not emptying before next storm hits?**
- **Also how do you ensure you are not just transferring problem to somewhere else on catchment? I was involved with project where closing overflows caused unsatisfactory overflow at sewage works (from storm tanks).**

We prioritise CSOs using DEFRA's Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan guidance (which in turn considers factors including Reasons for Not Achieving Good Status (RNAGS), Protected Areas, Designated eutrophic rivers (under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive), chalk streams and designated bathing areas.

Sewage works improvements are driven by failures to meet Water Framework Directive (WFD) standards (with the WFD aiming to protect and, where necessary, restore water bodies in order for them to reach good status, and to prevent deterioration).

On your second question, we'll be embracing the government's Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan (SODRP) which means none of our CSOs will be able to activate more than 10 times a year. In order to meet that figure in the scenario you've laid out, we're currently looking at the possibility of increasing the amount of wastewater we can treat at larger works and we may also convert smaller works, that deal with less flow, to ensure all wastewater can be treated before release.

Finally, as the SODRP applies to all of our overflows, we can't simply move the problem from one discharge point to another, as we have to comply with the no more than 10 activations figure at all of our CSOs.

26. Could UV on discharge to proposed "bathing areas" kill off beneficial bacteria and hinder ongoing biological purification and/or affect ecology by knocking out food for lower organisms?

We don't believe UV will knock out food sources for organisms lower on the food chain but enhanced sewage treatment and CSO spill reductions could do so. However, the overall outcome will be a more natural ecology in the rivers.

27. On a slightly different note, general public seem to see trout/salmon as indicator of good rivers but does that have detrimental effect on other coarse fish, seem to remember fishermen complaining when we did a project at Clay Mills?

Any change to water quality will typically have an impact on the existing ecology. Some fish like clean water, some don't as any change has an effect on the ecology that's built up over years. So smaller fish can become more vulnerable to predators (because the water's clearer) and/or have less to feed on (as there's less organic matter in the water) while it's great for the likes of trout and salmon.

28. Where is this extra water supply capacity coming from? Why do you want to avoid hose pipe bans? Surely during a drought, a hose pipe ban is a sensible measure.

The first thing to say is that our plans don't just focus on increasing water supply - we want to cut our leakage in half by 2045, to give everyone the tools they need to reduce the amount of water they use, and to better move existing supplies around our network so we can get water to where it's needed most.

In our draft Water Resources Management Plan (which is available on our website [here](#)) you can find out more about the range of different options we're considering – both reducing demand and increasing supply. And although we haven't had a hosepipe ban since the 1990s, you can find out more detail on the circumstances that one might be triggered to help to protect the environment in our Drought Plan [here](#).

29. What volume of leakages are reported in 2022 and how much water is saved by addressing these water leakages in 2023?

The great news is we're on target to reduce leakage by 15% to 2025, our biggest ever reduction in a five-year period. We'll be publishing our leakage levels for 2022/23 later this month (May 2023), and we can say we beat our year-on-year target in the previous year. In fact, we've committed to an even more ambitious target to reduce our leakage by 50% by 2045 - so it's something we're putting front and centre of our plans going forward.

- 30. Why are you spending money on skills training? What does this have to do with supplying water, this looks like a PR stunt to me? I'd like STW to spend the money on stopping sewage discharges and helping to clean up our rivers.**

We believe offering skills training to people who live in the region is all part and parcel of the wider role we have to play in society. While we very much get on with the day job 24/7, we also know we can use our resources to do more to help people who are also our customers by offering them training or resources to help them to improve their lot in life. That doesn't mean we aren't also concentrating on helping to clean up rivers (and you can read more about our Get River Positive scheme [here](#)), it just means we think we can do more to help the people and communities we serve than just by supplying clean water and taking away their wastewater.

- 31. When reservoirs were low last summer (for example Ladybower) why were they not dredged to hold more water?**

While this might seem like a straightforward answer to increasing capacity, in actual fact it could've caused more problems than it solved, if it were even possible in some cases. For example, the bed of a reservoir might be formed of a hard rock and excavating that could undermine its stability or even create a giant leak. In other cases, where the bed is mud or silt, the costs would be so high to dredge and safely remove the detritus as to make it unfeasible. On the plus side, we are currently looking at some other options for increasing capacity as part of our draft Water Resources Management Plan, which you can see [here](#).

- 32. We all have a role to play in saving water. What support can Severn Trent provide to help homeowners maintain the pipes and drains within their home?**

You're absolutely right that everyone has a part to play in saving water – and you'll have heard about some of our plans on how we intend to do that during the session, most notably by continuing to cut our leakage. In terms of support for customers, I'd urge everyone to book a free Home Water Efficiency Check where one of our technicians will come round, check out your water system to make sure everything's OK, help you get any problems fixed, and give you some free water saving devices. To book one just call 0330 159 50 70. Even if you don't want to have a check (and you really, really should – it's free) we offer subsidised water butts and use of the GetWaterFit service on our website, just go [here](#).

- 33. Will you be able to offer customers assistance with reducing their water usage? How will you make this known to customers (as many will not actively search for it, but would use information provided).**

We've got a great free service called the Home Water Efficiency Check that's highlighted on our website and in our social media channels (especially when it's hot and we could do with people using a little less water). It's a great service where one of our technicians will come round, check out your water system to make sure everything's OK, help you get any problems fixed, and give you some free water saving devices. To book one just call 0330 159 50 70. Even if you don't want to have a check (and remember it's free), we offer subsidised water butts and use of the GetWaterFit service on our website, just go [here](#).

- 34. Is there still a requirement in the Building Regs to fit a grease trap to food outlet premises? If not, could ST help the retrofit to those premises which are the most heavy users of oil/fat.**

There is indeed a requirement, but we often find that businesses haven't installed one or, if they have, they're just not big enough. We do have a team that works with various food businesses to make sure they install the right equipment (that's fit for purpose), and we also provide free training and guidance to outlets on best practices to help cut the amount of fats, oils, and grease going into our sewers. So we're getting there but it's a long job.

- 35. Are there dead areas in the ocean where water from the Severn and Trent empty? Am I right in thinking such dead areas are caused by nitrogen pollution in the rivers?**

The short answer's 'no' but you're absolutely right that high levels of nitrate in rivers can have an adverse impact on estuaries and coastal waters. Fortunately, there are no such issues with the River Severn or River Humber estuaries (with the Trent flowing into the Humber). The monitoring's carried out by the Environment Agency which produces 'weight of evidence of eutrophication' data for all estuaries and which assesses whether the ecology is being adversely affected by things like nitrates. Currently, there are no issues with eutrophication, which are the 'dead areas' you were asking about.

- 36. From personal experience about customer service; a leak was detected on our street, with ST's tests pointing it to being on the customer side, so not ST's responsibility. While the phone staff were very good, the letters that all the residents received seemed to be needlessly aggressive, upsetting a couple of**

elderly neighbours with threats of legal action. The remedial action was ordered to be completed in a very tight timescale, with no leeway. The leak had likely been going on undetected for quite some time. I appreciate the importance of repair works but found ST to be thoughtlessly aggressive in communications and not backed up by much practical support apart from contact home insurers.

I'm really sorry to hear that we caused any issues or concerns, especially to your elderly neighbours, as that really wasn't our intention. The letters are legal notices and so have to be worded in a very specific way in case we have to go to court to make sure the leak's fixed. Because of that, we're very limited in how we can word them, but we absolutely take on board your comments and I can assure you we'll review our letters to see how we can deliver our message in a softer way.

- 37. I noted water hardness was not picked up as a priority, but I think there is potentially an education piece to be done around the impact on water hardness...do enough customers understand the impact of high levels of hardness?**

Water hardness is something that occurs naturally when rainwater flows over rocks and the ground and picks up calcium and magnesium as a result. We know from our research that around a quarter of our customers experience limescale produced by hard water. But, when we ask customers if they want us to invest to soften water, more than four-fifths said 'no'. The feeling was that we had more important things to spend money on and that's why it's not a priority for our next investment period. That doesn't mean there's not more we can do, and you're probably aware that we have a section on our website dedicated to water hardness, which you can access [here](#). You can also check where your water comes from, how hard it is, and what's in it. We can, however, definitely signpost it to customers who might have concerns about the hardness of their water.

- 38. We get all sorts of wonderful reports from ST but never see how they perform against other companies. We want more info similar to leagues tables - but is this better than other companies?**

There are loads of independently produced 'league tables' that you can have a look at to see how we do. Ofwat produces annual reviews of companies' performance [here](#). Ofwat also produces annual reviews of companies' financial performance [here](#). The Consumer Council for Water (CCW) carries out regular research on customers' perceptions of their water company and annual assessments, with the latest report available [here](#). You can compare our environmental performance [here](#). And you can compare all companies' on bills on the [Discover Water](#) site.

39. Why are water companies not on the open market like gas and electricity so you can shop around for the best deal for you?

Water companies are, effectively, regional monopolies when it comes to homes, although the situation is different for businesses. That means there's only one supplier of clean and wastewater services in each of the UK's regions, although there is some overlap where one company might supply clean water and another deal with waste. On the other hand, in the business sector, a customer can switch retail supplier for water in England (and very large users can switch in Wales). Any decision to open up the domestic market to competition would, of course, have to be made by the government rather than by individual companies.

40. Is it mandatory to report to the CRAs [credit reference agencies] when someone is on the BDS [Big Difference Scheme]?... it does pose as a massive barrier to those who would benefit in short term vulnerability!

The short answer is that, yes, we have to record a customer being on the BDS with CRAs as it's a non-standard arrangement to pay (which just means a customer's receiving a reduced bill rather than a full bill). This sort of thing is very common, especially in the utilities sector, where we share data with, and receive data from, CRAs on all our customers. This helps us maintain up-to-date customer records, prevent fraud, and identify customers at risk of falling into debt – which also makes it easier for us to find and help customers who need financial assistance. It might not be the answer you want I'm afraid, but hopefully you can see that there's a good reason for us doing it.

41. Can household income be offset by essential expenditures in BDS affordability equation? Lots of people have incomes but 'deficit budgets'.

To make sure we're supporting people who earn the least, our current criteria for the BDS means we make an assessment of total household income. However, in our draft plans for 2025-30 we want to make sure support is available for anyone who's struggling to pay their water bills, so that means we may change our approach in the future to make sure we can support more people.

42. The company plan will go to Ofwat for approval, will STWA be proposing pro nature investment?

Absolutely. We firmly believe that nature-based solutions not only offer the best long-term answer in many areas, they also offer the best way for us to help combat climate change and biodiversity loss. Our research also suggests many of our customers support nature-based solution too as they not only provide an effective

alternative to traditional construction, they also make towns more attractive. You might've seen that we've begun trialling a variety of measures, like rain gardens, in Mansfield recently, and we're using learning from this experience to help us develop our future plans.

- 43. Water management is a shared responsibility that requires a multi sector approach which focuses on holistic and systems-based management. What role could Severn Trent Water have to shape and lead strategic partnership working, such as the River Severn Partnership, to drive water and environment management beyond what Severn Trent is committing to do individually and project by project with partners.**

Working with large, connected systems is what we do, so developing catchment-focused programmes to protect and enhance the environment is a logical extension of that. It's also really important to point out that, over the years, we've found that repairing natural habitats provides the best protection for communities against the worst effects of climate change, such as extreme rainfall and droughts. We can assure you we're fully engaged with a catchment-based approach which delivers programmes to secure broad environmental improvements to river health and are actively supporting the River Severn Partnership demonstrator programme which is focused on a range of catchment scale opportunities. On top of that, the development of our Green Recovery sustainable urban drainage project in Mansfield has demonstrated our commitment to partnership working. To get everything up and running we established new ways of working on flood risk issues with Mansfield District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council to ensure we could deliver wider economic and environmental benefits.

- 44. 7.6 million people paddle in the UK, over 2million swim, millions more row, sail or fish. While customers might not prioritise it, is there not a wider societal obligation to protect the health of people who enjoy our rivers?**

You might be aware of our bathing rivers investment programme, where we're making improvements to the rivers Leam, Avon, and Teme to encourage more people to enjoy the benefits of wild swimming. As you might imagine, our investment programme for 2025-30 is looking very hard at improving river health generally, with some of those investments deliberately targeted at areas (like the River Severn in Shrewsbury) where we know people like to paddle and swim. We also aim to install thousands of river quality monitors which will also allow us to post data in near real time to show anyone interested in using our region's water courses for recreation what the state of the river is. So, we're definitely working on it, but it's also an issue that will take some time to get right, especially given the

number of other agencies – like farmers and industries – that affect the health of our water courses – so it's very much a team game.

45. How flexible are your strategies if our climate changes to unexpected levels?

Sewerage infrastructure is a finite resource...long dry periods subject to sudden heavy storms can spill concentrated waters, equally, sustained heavy storms cannot always be contained, especially considering the aging infrastructure that still exists in many areas. Online and offline storage tanks can only contain whatever they have been designed to hold...targets are good, but climate change will heavily impact on the capacity to adequately plan for future events. How are you planning for future climate change impact?

As you can imagine the effects of climate change – whether that's drier, hotter summers or longer, wetter winters – is expected to have a massive impact on us and the work we do, as well as how we provide our services to our customers. I'd urge you to have a look at our Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan ([available here](#)) and our Water Resources Management Plan ([available here](#)) to see how we're planning for the future. We've also got a Climate Change Adaptation Report ([here](#)) which shows our thinking.

46. With Packington water re-use scheme was nutrient (Phosphate) removal a driver for choosing that location?

Location was the main issue here. Both Packington and Measham discharge into the River Mease, which is a Special Area of Conservation and which currently fails to meet conservation targets set by Natural England for both phosphate and naturalised flow. That gave us two options, to look for an alternative water course that could take the discharges without us causing it any issues or look at new and different ways of working. Given the nearest river was a considerable distance away, the reuse proposal was preferable.

47. Are these targets set by the Board or the real people, the customers?

We talk to thousands of people about our draft plans to get their views on what we're aiming to do and, where we can, we take on board their comments to make sure we're investing in the areas that matter most to them (and hopefully you). There are some areas where we don't have any flexibility, in that there's new legislation that we have to meet and so we have to invest to do that, but everywhere else we can (and do) take customer views on board. All of the commitments to improve performance that we include in our plan are also

scrutinised by Ofwat to ensure they are stretching, reflect customers' preferences, and offer good value.

48. Why aren't environmental standards higher? STW shouldn't need to be told or incentivised to act responsibly.

Currently, environmental standards are set by legislation (like the Water Framework Regulations) and laws governing protected areas (such as sites of special scientific interest, or SSSIs) and they're rightly challenging. It makes sense to us that appropriate environmental standards should be set at the national level by government, based upon independent advice from experts, to ensure they're consistent across all water companies (which also makes it easier for the industry to be benchmarked). That doesn't mean that we don't strive to go beyond national standards, just that it makes sense to have them set centrally. For example, we've worked really hard to deliver Environment Agency standards for phosphate removal at treatment works and intend to carry that on into the future.

You can see how the waste and water companies are rated on their environmental performance [here](#) and how we ranked on a range of metrics. As you'll see, we were just one of three companies to receive the highest rating in 2021 (with 2022 results due out later this year).

49 Does Severn Trent have a current Research & Development programme? If so, how much do they commit to R&D each year and what are the headline projects?

We do indeed have a Research and Development programme. You can read more about it, including a summary of some of the current headline projects, on our website [here](#).

50. I am a member of Severn Trent's customer TapChap forum. Recently, a discussion topic was sent out in which forum members were invited to comment on what was described as: "...a summary of the progress..." on ST's 'five river pledges'. I note that this now has been taken down from the forum. I was surprised and disappointed that ST apparently seems not to take the issue of river cleanliness at all seriously, as viewed in the context of this 'progress'. For example, ST said it would try to improve areas where river bathing takes place in only 3 places by 2025 (as far as I can recall the details). This was not even a guarantee. The word 'pitiful' springs to mind. Also, a pie chart was shown in which ST sought to demonstrate that river pollution was mainly caused by others and, by implication, it was up to others to sort it out. Yet, your own industry organisation has admitted that water companies need to own the problem rather than avoid it. "A water industry chief (Stuart Colville, director of policy at Water

UK) has admitted the sector has “genuine problems” with sewage pollution that need tackling and has said it is “pointless” for water firms to blame other sectors for the state of England’s rivers.” What additional, specific measures does Severn Trent intend to take to alleviate and, within a reasonable timescale, remove river-borne sewerage contamination? Should there be a national policy that all water Companies can agree in areas such as technology, equipment and measurement?

The first thing we want to say is that we absolutely take our responsibility with regard to river health incredibly seriously. We want to do as much as we can to help clean up our region’s rivers and our Get River Positive (GRP) pledges are a vital part of that. In fact you can read our first GRP annual report [here](#), and it shows the progress we’ve made over the last year.

The Environment Agency chart you mention as to which organisations cause rivers to not achieve ‘good’ status is in there as well. Our point on that would be that we want to show others what can be achieved and to help them where possible (so we work with farmers to encourage them to use less damaging fertilisers for example) while also working on areas that are our responsibility.

On bathing rivers, as part of our Green Recovery programme, we’re investing £78m to improve our network that will directly benefit 49km of our rivers, making them safer to swim in. There’ll be two new trial bathing areas, on the Leam near Leamington and the Teme near Ludlow, and we’ll make wider improvements to the River Avon, too. You can read more about what we’re doing [here](#).

Tap Chat activities are always removed from the site once each activity has closed. This is done so that members don’t submit responses which end up not being considered in reporting. However, the Get River Positive update is available on our website.

- 51. I worked on leakage for STW some years ago. We had data from DMA meters and step tests etc, but the vast majority of the work was "on the stick"; lifting covers and listening for leaks. I'd be interested to know if things have moved on in terms of using technology.**

You’ll be glad to know that listening sticks can still form part of our leak detecting armoury but we’ve also some fantastic new technology that does a better job. Last year alone, we fitted around 100,000 new meters in our network to help us ‘see’ what’s happening in our pipes, and our smart meter programme will help us even more in that area. We’ve installed thousands of acoustic loggers that can ‘hear’

leaks night and day. We've used drones to find leaks, especially in rural areas where they can cover much more ground than a man in a van, and we've even used satellites to spot leaks because we can use imagery and data literally gathered from space to monitor changes in the landscape near pipes. That could be changes to vegetation, water content in soil, puddles forming, and ground movement, all of which helps us spot a potential leak. We can even use satellites to pick up longwave radiation of chlorine in water, allowing us to track treated water escaping into the ground.

- 52. About eight years ago where I live in the Forest of Dean, the local council and Severn Trent came to various properties to run an experiment. What they did was dug three holes one at the edge, middle and right by the wall of my house, the idea being to run a resin coating inside the lead pipes supplying water to our property. Firstly, I would have thought that it would have made sense to run newer plastic pipes through instead of coating lead pipes, it is the 22st century and they had dug Three holes anyway. I think these properties where feasible need upgrading to modern piping, for health reasons, and if you are going to dig Three holes to pump a bit of rein in the old pipes, it wouldn't have taken a lot longer to dig a bit further and replace with modern piping, are there plans to do these upgrades please.**

It's important to start by pointing out that we only have responsibility for pipes that connect our big water pipes (usually buried in the road) to customer pipes, rather than customer pipes themselves, although we have previously, and still do, helped customers replace their *lead* pipes. The work you're talking about was when we trialled a new approach in the Lydney area of Gloucestershire (in 2014, so you were about right with your timescales). We replaced the larger lead pipes we owned but still found high lead levels when we sampled at customer taps. That was when, as part of a small trial, we lined customer lead pipes with a resin to both see if it was a useful technique and also to reduce disruption for customers. And the trial showed some promising results - our sampling showed lead levels were reduced.

We are continuing to explore what we can do to help our customers with their lead pipes, and are running trials in other areas at the moment (which you can read about [here](#)). These use different techniques that we may use in the future to help customers replace their pipes.

- 53. Can you tell me if the surface water run-off from roads goes directly to water courses or if it enters the combined sewerage system. If it goes directly to water courses, could consideration be given to divert this, in part, to a holding system**

where oil could be removed from the surface and solids settled at the base to allow a volume of water to be treated for drinking water. It seems to me that if it goes directly to water courses, it is taking with it oils and solids (e.g. plastics/rubber from tyre degradation and asphalt etc) which is in itself polluting. However, the vast majority of this water is rainwater and a valuable resource. If it is going into a combined sewerage system, in times of heavy rainfall it is responsible for overloading the capacity at the wastewater treatment works. It is, therefore, likely to be released to water courses along with raw sewage, polluting the rivers and causing harm to the environment. (Asked a question at meeting but I think this is a different one)

The honest answer is that it depends on the location. Technically, highways drainage shouldn't go into our sewer system but there are some places where this happens quite a lot (they were connected a long time ago). It's our long-term ambition to separate out surface water before it can reach our sewers as we see huge benefits in reducing the amount of wastewater getting into our network as that reduces the amount we have to treat, cuts the number of storm overflow activations, and reduces the risk of sewer flooding. It's a win-win for us.

More generally, however, highways drains are the responsibility of councils, so any improvements to water quality from road runoff also needs buy-in from councils, which makes it much more complicated. That said, one of the reasons we're trialling sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) – like rain gardens – is that they act as a filter between roads and water courses. You can find out more about the work on SuDS we're carrying out in Mansfield [here](#).

54. How many miles of pipework are your responsible for looking after in the Severn Trent region?

We maintain roughly 47,500km (or 29,600 miles) of bigger water pipes, which is enough to go round the Earth and then a bit further. We also look after around two million smaller pipes that connect people's homes to these larger pipes which are usually, but not always, located in the middle of the road.

55. How many miles of pipe work have already been replaced with plastic?

Since 1990 we've had an extensive replacement programme that's seen us replace nearly a quarter of older pipes, mainly made of iron, with modern plastic pipes that are much more resilient.

56. How long does do the plastic pipes last before they need replacing?

This is quite hard to answer as plastic pipes are a relatively new asset for us, but our latest research predicts that they should, all things being equal, last for 160 years.

- 57. How much will need replacing by the end of 2030? How many miles of old non plastic pipework will need replacing in by the end of 2030? How many miles of old pipe work are Severn Trent planning to replace per year between 2025-2030?**

In the next investment period, which runs between 2025 and 2030, we'll be looking to replace around 1,800km of older pipes. That's roughly the equivalent of the distance between Birmingham and Naples in Italy.

- 58. How much plastic pipework already needs replacing?**

While we're replacing some of the PVC pipes that were installed in the 1970s, they're very different to the modern polyethylene pipes we use today.

- 59. How long do the old clay pipes last before they need replacing?**

We don't used vitrified clay pipes for drinking water supplies so can't really answer. Sorry about that.

- 60. Is there an alternative that could be used with a lower carbon footprint that lasts longer? Could this alternative save money in the long run?**

We're always on the lookout for new options that could last longer, at a lower cost, and that have a lower carbon footprint, but polyethylene pipes are absolutely the best option currently. That might change in the future, and we'd certainly be open to that if a new option is developed.

- 61. If my memory serves me well, we were always taught at school that water is a continuous process by evaporating into clouds & returning as rain. The subject is obviously far more detailed than my simple statement, but it does suggest that the volume of water never changes (more or less). In which case, our main problem is that water does not fall where it is needed so surely our priority is to concentrate on increasing the storage of water & transferring to where it is needed.**

This does not eliminate the need to reduce wastage, but it will certainly reduce the demands on energy to process the wastage.

One of our main responsibilities is to ensure our customers have sufficient water at all times which is why we're currently developing our Water Resources Management Plan which looks at supply-demand for the next 25 years. If you have

a look [here](#) you can see our thinking about how we'll be able to make sure there's enough water for everyone in the future through a combination of finding new sources, cutting our leakage, educating customers to reduce their usage, and looking into creating new assets. It's currently in draft and we'll be publishing a final version later this year following a consultation with our customers and stakeholders.

62. Climate change is resulting in increased extreme weather events including drought, heatwaves, increased water supply interruptions. How will you proactively help your domestic customers and small high water dependent businesses to prepare to be more resilient to these changes so their negative impacts are lessened or prevented?

We're very aware of the potential impacts of climate change in our region which is why our draft Water Resources Management Plan (which you can have a look at [here](#)) is designed to give us more drought resilience as we expect hotter summers in the future. We already run customer education campaigns, including our education team who go into the region's schools to educate children about the importance of using water wisely. We also believe our rollout of smart meters will help further as people will have a much better idea of how much water they're using (and how much they could save by using less). For businesses, we have a target to reduce water usage by 9% by 2038, and we'll be working with water retailers to see how we can work together to help businesses hit that target.

63. How far are you thinking about engaging younger people/future generations in your business plans and long-term thinking?

As part of our research work on our plans for 2025-30 we've engaged with younger people who may not currently be a billpayer. That gives them the chance to have their say on our plans and gives us the opportunity to better understand what our future customers are looking for from us. We're also trying to inspire the younger generation to use water wisely through our schools programme which we hope will give them a greater interest in water as they grow older.

64. Can you provide examples of where you have genuinely co-created solutions with your local communities, customers and wider stakeholders to improve service design and support the environment?

Our Farming for Water Programme has used scientific evidence and expert opinion to support the need for landscape change in a catchment. We've worked with stakeholders (including farmers and landowners) to bring about land management improvements voluntarily. We've used local expertise and insight to deliver our

schemes efficiently through partnerships with organisations such as local rivers and wildlife trusts with complementary objectives for our catchments. Through the last two investment periods (2015-2025) we've developed our catchment management approach to address water quality issues and learned how to secure additional natural capital benefits while delivering our core obligations. Our Moors for the Future programme has secured water resources for more than a million customers in the Peak District. The area's peat bogs have been severely degraded over many years which meant the water running off the moors was highly coloured and difficult and expensive to treat. Over the last 10 years we've been working with many other organisations, such as the Peak National Park, the National Trust and the Environment Agency on this. The project focused on restoring 114 hectares of peatland through revegetation, blocking 40,000 gullies, and the planting 170 hectares of trees. These catchment interventions have improved raw water quality, generated biodiversity gains, and delivered carbon sequestration benefits. The work has avoided a £900,000 investment in new water treatment at our Bamford works and reduced operating costs for the existing treatment process, delivering a significant financial benefit for customers as well as improving peatland.

65. How does your public purpose influence your business plan proposals in terms of where you go above and beyond core water business services? How are you planning on supporting citizens rather than just customers during the next price control period?

We absolutely recognise that we have a wider responsibility to society than just supplying water and taking away wastewater. One of the main examples of that is our Community Fund which we created in January 2020 to donate more than £10m over five years to community projects across the region, to make a real difference in the communities we serve. So far, we've awarded £1.9m to 73 projects, together with an additional £103,000 supporting 34 organisations through our short-term Coronavirus Support Fund. You can find out more about the work of the fund [here](#), including annual reviews for 2021 and 2022.

We've also launched ambitious plans to help change the lives of 100,000 people, giving them improved chances in life and tackling the underlying causes of poverty. We'll be working with hundreds of schools, offering 500 work experience placements for children, at least 10,000 hours of free skills and employability training in communities, and 'pop-up' Academies reaching thousands of individuals. You can read our press release about our plans [here](#).

In terms of what we're planning in our business schemes for 2025-30, we've got ambitious plans to support more financially vulnerable customer than ever before

by expanding our social tariff schemes. Through our Get River Positive pledges (which you can read about [here](#)) we're working to deliver healthier rivers by ensuring our assets cause no harm to the region's water courses.

- 66. Increasing numbers of people are swimming in open water and participating in water-based recreation. Some companies are publishing where they are discharging sewage into rivers and seas, but it is hard to interpret what this data means i.e., is the water safe to swim in? Other companies are training staff and communities about water safety. How have you helped promote water safety for your consumers and employees and how do you propose to do this in your 2025-30 business plan so we can safely swim and play in our rivers and seas?**

As part of our Green Recovery programme, we're investing £78m to improve our network, to the benefit of 49km of our rivers, and making them safer to swim in. There'll be two new trial bathing areas, on the Leam near Leamington and the Teme near Ludlow, and we'll make wider improvements to the River Avon. You can read more about the schemes [here](#).

As part of our Get River Positive Pledges, we're also looking at how we can make newly available data about rivers more accessible for communities. In our first [annual report](#) setting out our progress against the pledges, we explain more about how we've completed the installation of monitors that record the duration that our storm overflows activate for - some 12 months ahead of our industry's targets.

We've also set up a water quality monitoring programme at Carsington Water in Derbyshire and Tittesworth Reservoir in Staffordshire. This monitoring is providing us with the information we need in preparation for holding organised sporting events at the sites. Learning from initiatives like these is helping to inform our 2025-30 plan where we'll be looking to expand our river water quality monitoring further.

- 67. Have you or will you be engaging with stakeholders in your region to develop a consumer vulnerability strategy outlining how you will deliver inclusive accessible services and protect customers and communities for 2025-30? When will this be published and how will it be updated?**

While we're not planning to publish a separate strategy at the moment, there will be a strong focus on affordability in our plans for 2025-30. To develop our plans, we've been reaching out to customers and other stakeholders get a much better idea of what people are actually thinking, how they're doing, and what they think of our plans (or even if they have great ideas of their own). To give you an idea of what we've done, we've surveyed 750 struggling customers, talked in-depth with a

smaller number of affordability stakeholders, and run workshops with 20 struggling customers to help us design affordability strategies together. We'll also be running an affordability and vulnerability stakeholder event on May 23 in Coventry with organisations that represent our customers.

There's always more to be done in the affordability and vulnerability space, especially given the current issues many people face, and we can assure you it's something we take incredibly seriously, and we'll be making a difference wherever we can.

68. How do you see consumer vulnerability in your area changing in the next 5-15 years and what impact has that had on your business plan proposals and strategy?

We're very aware that many of our most vulnerable customers are finding it more and more difficult to make ends meet, particularly with everything that's going on in the world at the moment. That's why we launched a £30m affordability package to expand our financial support to a total of 315,000 people by 2025 (which is about 6% of our total number of customers – around the same number that CCW analysis last year suggested lived in water poverty), and we're proposing to expand that further in the next investment period. On top that, we launched our 10-year societal strategy late last year which is designed to help up to 100,000 people from across the Midlands find employment by offering them the chance to improve and enhance their skills to give them a better chance of finding work. We're also committing to giving 10,000 hours of free skills training and employability training in communities and schools to support individuals into their first job, or back in to work. We're absolutely committed to evolving our vulnerability and affordability support for years to come to meet the changing needs of our customers.

Disclaimers

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Glossary

AMP	Asset Management Plan
AMP8	Asset Management Plan 8, for the period 2025-2030
CCW	Consumer Council for Water
C-MeX	Customer Experience Measure
CSO	Combined Sewer Overflow
MOSL	Market Operator Services Limited – the market operator for the non-household water retail market in England
PR24	Price Review 2024