

# South Staffs Water

## Your Water, Your Say session (15<sup>th</sup> October) summary report

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*Bringing the voices of communities into the heart of organisations*



## Your Water, Your Say

15 October 2024

## Contents

1.	Background to Your Water, Your Say event	3
2.	Speakers and Independent Chair	3
3.	Attendees	3
4.	Company presentation	4
5.	Summary of key points raised	4
6.	Full Q&A from online session	5
7.	Additional questions	16



## 1. Background to Your Water, Your Say event

As water is a vital public service and water customers have no choice over who supplies their drinking water, South Staffs Water run an extensive engagement programme. This helps ensure their plans and investments reflect their priorities and those of wider stakeholders.

An important part of this programme involves South Staffs Water holding sessions to give their customers and wider stakeholders the opportunity to ask questions directly to South Staffs Water's Leadership team about the company's recent performance.

On **15 October 2024**, they held their most recent 'Your Water, Your Say' session. This was held online (on Zoom).

Customers and wider stakeholders joined members of the Senior Leadership team to discuss the company's performance over the last 18 months with a focus on customer service, support for customers paying their water bills, water quality, leakage and environmental investments. Those who registered for the session had access to pre-read materials ([Your Water, Your Say | South Staffs Water](#)) and were able to submit questions in advance of the session, regardless of whether or not they were able to attend the session.

## 2. Speakers and Independent Chair

For the session itself, South Staffs Water put forward a panel of four speakers to provide an overview of the company's performance and take questions and answers. These speakers were:

- Andy Willicott - Managing Director
- Caroline Cooper - Strategy and Regulations Director
- Natalie Akroyd - Director of Quality and Environment
- Gary Kinsella - Customer Delivery Director

South Staffs Water appointed Community Research (Rebecca Addis and Kate Waller) to independently chair the meeting and write this summary report.

## 3. Attendees

South Staffs Water emailed household customers, business customers and wider stakeholders inviting them to take part in the session. The company also used social media and its website to promote the event and asked people to forward on to friends, family and colleagues. However, it was mostly household customers that attended the session.

A number of observers were also present, including employees of South Staffs Water and representatives from the Consumer Council for Water and Ofwat. In total 18 people attended the session, including observers.



## 4. Company presentation

South Staffs Water gave a 20-minute presentation, outlining the company's core activities and overarching commitments set out in the 2020-25 business plan. They then went on to focus on four key areas and several associated performance targets. The full presentation can be found [here](#), and below is a brief summary of the key areas:

- Customer service – including how South Staffs Water has missed a recent performance target and the steps it is taking to ensure that it is achieved in the future.
- Support for customers paying their water bills – including how South Staffs Water has exceeded its performance target and how it is continuing to invest in financial support for customers.
- Water quality – outlining how South Staffs Water has achieved its performance target alongside its planned investments in water treatment works and lead supply pipe replacement.
- Leakage – setting out how South Staffs Water narrowly missed its performance target on leakage and the work it is doing to both improve its network and achieve universal metering.

## 5. Summary of key points raised

Several themes emerged from the range of questions put forward by attendees during the Q&A session.

- Perceived water quality issues
  - Although not technically associated with water quality, attendees raised issues regarding water hardness and cloudiness, with specific complaints about both the potability of the water and its impact on household appliances. Customers wanted to know if there were any plans to soften hard water.
  - Several customers asked about fluoridation of water. One customer questioned who would be liable for the decision to add fluoride to water if it became a public health issue, in light of a recent legal case in USA.
- Customer service
  - Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the customer service they had received, particularly regarding the Assure tariff, missed bill payments and the lack of reminders before involving debt collection agencies.
- Water conservation and smart metering
  - Questions were raised in relation to how South Staffs Water supported customers in conserving water and reducing demand, with customers enquiring about both smart metering plans and water-efficient practices.
- Future billing and tariff structures



- Customers asked South Staffs Water about their plans to raise water bills and questioned the possible use of new block tariffs in the future.

The full Q&A can be found below.

## 6. Full Q&A from online session

**Chair:** Why don't I start the ball rolling because we have had a couple of questions on water quality and they're quite similar questions.

**Question 1A:** So firstly, someone has moved from a Severn Trent Water area to South Staffs Water, and has noticed that there is a distinct difference in water hardness. So much so that it's impacting household appliances which use water in their daily function. Being in a new build property the developer did put some form of equipment at the first point of entry to lessen the impact, yet they find themselves having to descale equipment more often than they would like? Their question is, do you have any plans to improve water quality so that they impact of hard water is lessened for its customers. If so, what is the timeline?

**Question 1B:** And then somebody else who had a similar question from the Armitage area. They said that their water quality has deteriorated over the years they have lived there to such affect that they cannot drink straight from the tap. They explained that their kids do not want to drink from the tap as the water is always cloudy and takes about five minutes to settle to any clear state. They have had to invest in water filters and keep water in the fridge for the kids to have drinking water. They want to know if there is anything that can be done to improve the quality of the water so that when it comes out of the tap it looks OK drink. Natalie, would you like to come in on that?

**Answer 1A (Natalie):** I'll tackle the first one that you raised first around the water filter. So I think it's important to reiterate that our water meets the really high standards I talked about for drinking water, but I appreciate that taste preferences will vary from person to person. And particularly when you move house, that is when you might notice a change in the taste of your water because inevitably it will come from a different source of water. I think if people have individual concerns about their water then absolutely – we would welcome people kind of contacting us. We can send one of our employees out to kind of test the water and do some sample testing on that, and provide the results to you to give you any assurance around that. But I think it's just that change of water hardness often leads to changes in taste that people notice when they move house. *For more detail please see the response for question 8.*

**Answer 1B (Natalie):** The second question that you mentioned was around cloudy water. So cloudy water is traditionally due to air bubbles in the pipe and it can even



be because your hot and cold pipes in your house are a little bit too close together. So cloudy water is not any kind of water quality issue. If you leave the water to stand for a while it will kind of go clear. But I appreciate that it doesn't always look great in that situation. So again, I would say if anybody has got any concerns, please feel free to contact us and we can send somebody out to have a look. But cloudy water is around air bubbles in the pipe rather than a quality issue.

**Question 2A:** Just a couple of points. One was on the water quality performance chart. With the figures regarding that going down, I was wondering whether that figure has been affected by the amount of people that drink bottled water now? So you don't tend to get people complain about the water that they bath or shower in, but I had a quick look before I came on and around about 3.5 billion litres of bottled water a year are sold in the country. So I wasn't too sure about whether the chart was skewed a little bit because of that reason?

**Question 2B:** The second point was about fluoridation of water. Whether you are aware of a recent court case in the US where the federal court has ordered the EPA (the Environmental Protection Agency) to regulate the unreasonable risk it found to be posed by fluoridation of drinking water to children; it was affecting their IQ. So I don't know if this is an issue for this country.

**Question 2C:** The third question was just about the cost of the current water bills. I thought, you know, personally my bill now is about – it's just under £500 a year and I live in Birmingham where we've got some of the worst quality of water in the country. So do you have any ideas of whether you are going to be raising those bills any more or not? There is three questions there but if you can answer or contact me about any of those points?

**Chair:** Perfect. Alright, thank you. I think Natalie for the first two questions to reply?

**Answer 2A (Natalie):** So around the bottled water skewing the figure. It's a really interesting question actually. So I don't know how much bottled water has increased – the use of it hasn't increased enough over the last four/five years to be able to offset those figures as considerable as they have been. I think what I would say is that the taste, odour, smell kind of elements, whether people are drinking it or not, we still find that people would want to contact us if it's not appropriate in their house. If you are bathing or you're washing your clothes in tap water, people would still contact us in that situation. So I can't say definitively that it definitely hasn't has an impact, but I would suggest that those are still really important factors for people when they contact us.

**Answer 2B (Natalie):** We add fluoride to the water supplied to customers in the South Staffs Water region where the natural levels of fluoride in water is below the level required to prevent tooth decay. While we are responsible for adding the fluoride to the water, the decision to do so is actually made by the local health



authority, not by ourselves, and they instruct us to do that on their behalf. We follow the Drinking Water Inspectorate guidance on safe fluoridation and ensure that the levels in drinking water are safe for all customers, including children, to drink.

**Chair:** And then the third one around bill cost.

**Answer 2C (Caroline):** So you said, I think, it was £500 a year which I'm guessing is that your clean water and your waste water, or is that just your clean water?

**Response from participant:** Yes, that will be total cost.

**Answer 2C.1 (Caroline):** The average drinking water bill in this region is about £180 so yours is a little bit higher. And, going forward into the next planning period from 2025, we are looking to increase bills. There is a significant amount of investment that we need to make. We are on the comparative lower end of the scale in terms of bill increases compared to other companies. I think, before you take into account inflation, it's probably around 12%, and there is a significant amount of work we need to do in terms of rolling out water meters. These help our customers to manage and us support them using water and using less water going forward. Being totally transparent, there will be a bill increase coming. But you don't sound particularly high in terms of your bill so I would sometimes point people towards getting a meter but you sound like you're about just above average.

**Response from participant:** My neighbour – again, before we started the meeting, that's why I was a little late, I popped to my neighbour who has actually got a water meter. We are a two-person household and they're a two-person household as well. His bill was a tiny bit cheaper. Not the sort of amount that you would expect. When I went to see him, I expected there to be a bigger difference, and the difference was around about £50/£60 maybe between his and mine. So I would have expected that that may have been lower. That wouldn't be enough to make me switch onto a meter.

**Response from speaker:** We do have some online calculators where you can put in your average consumption patterns and that will tell you. It does give you a view of what your bill might be if you were to switch to a meter. So you probably would be marginally better off. I think you ended your question with a "and you've got the worst water quality in the country" comment, in Birmingham. I mean I would disagree with that.

**Question 3:** It has just actually reminded me about meters. How long do you think it will be before everybody is on this new smart meter? How long do you think it will take? Is it going to be enforced?

**Answer 3 (Natalie):** In the South Staffs region, at the moment around 43% of our household customers are on a water meter. And what we are looking to do is roll out universal metering to every customer, where it's possible, because we accept that





there are some situations, joint supply, some flat arrangements where that is just not going to be feasible. But we are looking at rolling that out to all of our customers by 2035. So it will be a phased approach over the next ten years and trying to get us as close to that 100% metering at all properties as possible.

**Response from participant:** Will these be these new smart meters where it will go to people's phones, like the energy bills? So we'll be able to see daily? I'm concerned. I've sort of been reading about these people having huge bills because they've had a water leak that they weren't aware of and they've only found out when the bill has been really sort of topped up after sort of six months. They've found out they've had a leak and it's a bit too late in the day.

**Answer 3.1:** So the water meters we are fitting are what we are calling smart and it's a really strange word for this, I appreciate that. But it will be similar to your electricity meters in that it will give information every 15 minutes. What we are working through now is how we get that information to you as a customer, whether it's an app like you mentioned there on your phone, or whether you can log into your account and see it. I think one of the key things for us to do as part of those meter installs though is when we are coming round the property, we need to identify are there any issues like that, like you've mentioned there around leakage. The advantage of these smart meters is that we'll get information really quickly and what we will be doing with that information is monitoring that to see is there anybody that has got what we would class as high usage. For us to then come out and contact you and say we've had a couple of months' worth of data now, it looks really high, can we help you come and look for a leak? And then we can identify that and help solve it. What we do have is a leakage allowance system as well. So if customers identify you've got a leak on your property, if you tell us about it, then we can look at – and you get it fixed in a short space of time – we can look at options for making sure that you're not charged for and it doesn't affect your bill from that point of view.

**Chair:** I see that you submitted another question that might be quite interesting. I don't know if you wanted to ask it yourself? It was about the tariffs and charging for water in a different way?

**Question 4:** It was, just I think the new government's proposals, I don't know how they've thought about it, but they are charging water in blocks so that your first block would be at a lower rate and then the next block, they are trying to hit people with swimming pools or large gardens without water butts. So what are your thoughts on that? I mean they'll be coming forward, the Government, with this idea, I think, to all the water companies.

**Answer 4 (Caroline):** I think being able to develop different tariff structures is a great way for managing customers' consumption. As Natalie said, we need to have those smart meters installed. The infrastructure needs to be in place first to be able





to measure customers' usage. So it's a bit of a challenge to be able to roll those out straight away. That said, we are doing trials ourselves. So, from next year we are looking to trial some different tariff structures, more from an affordability angle rather than the consumption angle. I definitely think once that meter infrastructure is in, different kind of block tariffs will become more able to be used by water companies.

**Response from participant:** Oh right. Just one more thing that I picked up from the presentation. I didn't realise that you'd still got a load of lead pipes.

**Response from speaker:** They are not the big pipes that run down your road but they are the smaller pipes that connect your home to the mains pipe in the road, which were probably put in when your house was built. So for those older properties, there are still some lead pipes out there.

**Response from participant:** So that is quite serious, isn't it? You know?

**Response from speaker (Caroline):** We do treat the water which puts a coating on the lead pipe that stops the lead leaching out. So you are protected. But ideally, we wouldn't want to have lead in the distribution system at all. So the aim is to take it out but at the moment, until we get rid of it all, we have a treatment solution that safeguards you.

**Question 5:** So what is your target then for getting rid of these pipes?

**Answer 5 (Natalie):** Over the next five years we have a target to replace nearly 2,000 lead pipes, including our most vulnerable customers in nurseries and schools. We are also using this time to define a strategy of working towards becoming lead free in the future. Unfortunately, this is not as easy as it sounds as there are challenges faced not just with lead replacement but lead solder, shared housing and rented accommodation.

**Response from participant:** It just seems really serious to me. You know, it's something I've not thought about until it was just brought up.

**Answer 5.1 (Andy):** It's one of the challenges we face in domestic and commercial properties of a certain age, and it might not even be the pipe that is connecting to our main in the street. It could be the internal pipework in individual properties that needs to be looked at as well. So we will need to continue to treat the water so that it stops that lead from leaching for many, many years. But this isn't something that we can do overnight because it will require customers to potentially replace internal property pipework as well. It's going to be many years before we can really confidently say we no longer need to treat the water to prevent that leaching because we wouldn't take that risk.



**Response from participant:** Do you happen to know how old the house – you know, when the first were built without lead? What age of house? You know, mine is 1933 but I know there was lead, having had stuff done, but like 1950s and 60s?

**Answer 5.2 (Natalie):** 1970 onwards was when lead pipe stopped being used. But if houses have had any kind of restructuring or remediation, or renovation type work, then they may have been replaced as part of that for older properties.

**Chair:** Thank you. There is a question in the chat to ask now.

**Question 6:** Why is it so difficult to get through to the reception? When I called, I was waiting for 45 minutes and in the end I have had to give up.

**Chair:** So I think a general response. Obviously, we don't know what the circumstances were in that situation but just in terms of kind of response times in customer service potentially.

**Answer 6 (Gary):** So, first of all, apologies that you've had to wait that long. 45 minutes isn't normal. So we work with our contact centre to ensure that, based on forecast and number of customers that call in, we even get it down to 15-minute intervals based on historical data to understand when we need to be able to have sufficient staff to answer the calls when they do arrive. That time of 45mins isn't normal, but I do apologise for that. And it's a piece of work that we continually challenge ourselves on to make sure that how quickly are we answering the phones to our customers? But this comes back to the 360 view of the customer I was talking about earlier, which is the aim is to provide a number of different options to our customers in order to be able to communicate with us. So not everybody wants to pick up the phone. Other people will be happier sending a WhatsApp message or actually going onto Twitter, or X as it's well-known now. So the aim is to provide more choice for customers.

**(Andy)** And probably Gary we can find a way of getting this customer some sort of response to whatever particular matter that they were calling about.

**Chair:** In the meantime, I do have another question, for Gary, that came in in advance. And it was about somebody who missed a bill payment.

**Question 7:** I had first-hand experience of missing a bill payment. First ever bill I had missed paying (due to my human error) because I read the email/text, put it on my to do list in my head and then forgot about it and didn't pay it. Instead of South Staffs trying to contact me to remind me to pay, I received absolutely nothing. After 5 months, I receive a letter from a debt collection agency (Opus) requesting the money. Initially, I thought it was a hoax because I am always up to date with payments. Realising it wasn't fake; I paid the bill straight away. Personally I think, South Staffs should try and contact customers either by email or text message or even post to remind them if they have missed a bill. It's quite worrying that the bill



just gets forgotten about and then a debt collecting agency gets in contact. I would be grateful for feedback on this because I would hate to see other customers go through the same experience I did when it was unnecessary if you had contacted me / bill reminder was sent.

**Answer 7 (Gary):** Absolutely. So I read that and I was quite alarmed because that isn't our standard process that we follow. Understandably, customers, we all do it from time to time where we cancel a direct debit by mistake, or we miss a payment. So the aim is to actually communicate with our customers on a regular basis, and we have different methods for when we communicate with our customers. And that can be via letter and it can be via text, and also by an outbound phone call to the customer. So that's quite normal in terms of the approach we take. So I'm not quite sure what's happened in this particular case, but I just want to assure the customer and everybody on the call this isn't the normal process that is followed. We do take a number of steps. And, of course, debt collection agency, in terms of sending the customer a letter, that is very much the last resort. So the aim is to be able to be here to support customers and anything we can do to help in terms of making their payments.

**Question 8:** What is the main reason for leaks? Does it have anything to do with the fact that South Staffs water is hard water? Are there any plans to soften at source? So two questions in one really about leakage and hard water?

**Answer 8 (Natalie):** So leakage happens for a variety of reasons. Caroline mentioned earlier the age of the pipework has quite an impact on that and the time that it's been in use. Another reason is to do with the weather and the temperature. So, particularly when the ground freezes and then it thaws again, that causes a shift in the ground movement which causes the pipes to move and can cause them to fracture as they expand and contract with the change in temperature. And that happens in the summer as well. If we have prolonged periods without any rain and the ground gets really hard, we also see that kind of changes in ground movement which can also lead to leakage as well. Of course, there are going to be instances where there is leakage on pipes located on customers' properties. Around about 30% of our leakage is on customer supply pipes and internal plumbing and the remaining 70% is on our pipework. So trying to locate leakage on customer supply pipes can be really tricky. Another reason why we think metering will be a really good way to help with that and to be able to help identify that leakage really quickly and get in and help solve it.

The water hardness isn't a direct link to leakage. I appreciate that hard water can have an impact on appliances such as kettles and washing machines, and that's because of the higher mineral content in the water. In terms of plans to look at softening the water, we have previously undertaken customer research on this topic to understand how much of an issue it is for our customers and also how much



customers might be willing to pay extra on their bills in order to have softer water. So just to reiterate that hard water or soft water, it still meets the drinking water standards. And when we've spoken to customers about it we actually see a really mixed response on this. Some customers feel really strongly about hardness, because of the impact on their appliances, as I mentioned, but also people tend to prefer the taste of harder water because of that mineral content, and we actually get quite polarised views on it. To treat water hardness there are a variety of different considerations we have to consider. So you have to chemically treat the water to soften it. There is quite an increased carbon cost with doing that as it is higher power usage for us, and there is also quite a bit of water that gets wasted through the softening process. So if you have a water softener in your house, for example, it will increase your water usage around about 10%. Obviously, we are trying to reduce water wastage as much as possible. So the environmental impact of water softening is something that we need to have some serious consideration of. To build that water treatment, that additional softening, it's an additional cost on customer bills as well. And so we need to balance all of those things together to prioritise our future investment in improving other areas of water quality like we mentioned, but also securing water supplies for the future. So there is quite a lot of balances that we need to make there and, based on the fact that the water does meet the standards, we do get kind of those kind of polarised customer views. At the moment we don't have any plans to do any water softening in our South Staffs region.

**Question 9:** Since 2022 I was told about the Assure tariff, which I think was mentioned earlier. Also in 2022 a lot of peoples' information got out which unfortunately mine was one of them. Since then, I've been asked to send in all my documents, which I have, and I still don't have any information on the Assure tariff I just keep getting asked for my information to be sent in but I am not being billed so I honestly don't know what to do. So my question is where is all my personal information going?

**Answer 9 (Gary):** I think just regarding the Assure tariff, I know you mentioned at the start, it's very difficult to get into individual's sort of personal queries. But what I will say is sorry to hear about your troubles getting help. Please email me your information in terms of what your query is and I will make sure I pick it up tomorrow. We'll get back to you to find out what's happening.

**Chair:** And Andy, did you want to say anything on the cyber side of things which was raised in this question?

**Answer 9.1 (Andy):** So these sessions are really helpful because they help me and the team form a view as to where we've got things right and where things are still slipping through the net. Unfortunately we did suffer from an illegal cyber-attack a couple of years ago. That really impacted a number of our systems that we use for metering, for our customer services, and some in our operational teams out in the



field as well. And we had to turn off a lot of that functionality, which ultimately has led us to put some sometimes more restricted processes in place (a) to protect our customers given the data involved. But that has had the negative effect when making the transactions that we undertake with our customers a little bit more challenged. And (b) it's also led to some confusion around some exchanges of communications and people telling us that they provided the information, as in this case, and it just hasn't been actioned, or maybe it's been actioned but we just haven't correctly gone back to the customer to explain the outcome of that. So, Gary is going to post his email address in the chat now. That's available for all customers. If you've got any follow-up on any particular items, please come contact Gary and we will get to the bottom of that as quickly as possible. It's been a frustrating time for us because, as the chart showed when Gary updated us earlier, we really were going in the right direction on all of our customer services measures. You've seen over the last couple of years they've gone backwards a little bit, so it is one that we need to get right and, again, apologies to all of our customers that were subsequently affected by this illegal cyber event.

**Chair:** I can see another question for Gary in the chat. I don't know if you'll be able to answer on the specifics.

**Question 10:** I've recently been moved to meter. After the meter was installed, I was told I have £70.00 credit. This credit has never reflected on my two previous bills.

**Answer 10 (Gary):** It's quite hard to talk about individual cases without knowing the full facts and what's happened. But I think if you can – I've just posted my email address so if you can please drop me an email with some of your details and we'll pick that up tomorrow and get back to you.

**Chair:** I do have another question that came through earlier in advance of the session.

**Question 11:** I am interested to know what measures are being made to conserve water? If we all took great accountability, then so much brown water would not be hitting our rivers and seas.

- Household water butts
- Farming water collection and field watering
- Sewage water re-cycling and crop watering

**Answer 11 (Natalie):** So every five years we produce a water resource management plan and that outlines what water we are going to have for the next 25-years, what we'll have available to us, but also how much we think our customers are going to need and how much the environment is going to need, and we balance all those together and identify what actions we need to do to make sure that both our customers and the environment have got sustainable supplies of water. A really



fundamental part of that water resource management plan is looking at that demand for water and how we reduce the demand as much as possible; so how we conserve water. And we've talked about leakage and that's a really key part for us to tackle and reduce the demand for water. We believe our smart metering programme that we've talked about will also help with that. It will help identify leakage and it will help us identify where household customers and non-household customers might have higher usage, so that we can help support that and help with water efficient devices, or education to help reduce the usage in those environments as well.

There is a whole range of water efficiency activities that we will be looking at undertaking through audits, like supportive audits on houses and non-household properties, so businesses and commercial properties. And we are promoting things like rainwater harvesting. Water butts are a really good example of something that is really quick and easy to do in your own household as well. And we have got an area of our website (<https://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/environment/saving-water/helping-our-customers-to-save-water/>) which does highlight how customers can save water in your own household from things like turning the tap off when you brush your teeth to putting a bowl in your sink when you're doing your washing up. There is a whole range of different activities there. A couple of the other things that we are doing is working with farmers in our region to help them improve their practices so that the run-off from their fields is reduced, so we're getting less phosphates and nitrates into our water courses. So improving our environmental quality, but also some of that is the drinking water that we will then take and treat. So the more we can improve it at source the better. So we are supporting our customers with that as well. But our water resource management plan has all of our details on that (<https://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/about-us/our-strategies-and-plans/our-water-resources-management-plan>). It's quite a long document. We do have a customer-friendly one which is a lot less pages on that. I'll find the pages as we carry on and I'll just post those in the chat for anybody who is interested in more information on how you could reduce demand in your household.

**Chair:** I don't have any more questions that were sent in advance and I can't see any more questions in the chat. Does anybody else have any more questions?

**Question 12:** When you're doing the works on the roads do you liaise with the Highways Agency or whatever to link in with other organisations that are doing works, like with cable or with the gas, so that the work is done together to stop the disruption to motorists?

**Answer 12 (Caroline):** We do. We work harder than probably people realise to do that. Of course it works if we've got some planned work. Often our work is emergency work due to a burst main or something. Whilst we will do a bit of a ring around to see if any other utility has an issue in that particular location and wants to sort of open up the ground at the same time, often our work has to be carried out





quite quickly to get customers back into supply. So that's not always possible. But certainly for planned work, and we have to coordinate this through, as you say, the highway authorities and local authorities as well to make sure that the impact to customers and commuters is minimised. Not always possible, I'm afraid, but we definitely try.

**Response from participant:** Just one thing. On that front page, you say we are a water company. Why don't you say drinking? Because you said drinking water and it made it so much clearer to me because I kept on looking at that and thinking that just doesn't look right. That sentence didn't seem right to me. But with drinking water it's clear, you know, to a non-professional.

**Response from speaker (Andy):** That's really helpful feedback because we wrestled with this a little bit. The industry has lots of abbreviations and terminologies which don't always translate well to customers and communities. I like to refer to us as a drinking water company because I think it's easier and more straight-forward. So allow us to learn from that and we'll update the presentation for future audiences. Thank you.

**Question 14:** Just to jump back to that fluoridation question again. I was just wondering, regarding the duty of care, so the Health Authority tell you to put the fluoride in the water, nobody has discovered it is harmful – as a duty of care, who would be liable? Have you questioned the Health Authority should something legally change regarding toxicity of the fluoride? Because obviously you are the ones putting it in but you've been told to put it in. So do you need to clarify who would be liable should there be anything? This question you don't have to answer, it was just a point that – something I would just like to point out, whether you need to clarify that for your own sake regarding a liability should anything out of this recent court case in the US.

**Answer 14 (Caroline):** I think great, thank you for looking out for us and it's something we will definitely take away and check. But it's actually part of our licence to operate that we do put fluoride in. We'll take that one away from a legal point of view. There is always a new precedent being set, isn't there, with court cases, so we can check.

**Answer 14.1 (Andy):** Adding Fluoride to the water is set in our licence arrangements, so we are obliged to do this. I think potentially we would be more exposed if we refused to. It's a watching eye for us because, like everything in life, standards change, rules change, and our job is to try and stay ahead of it. That hasn't been challenged recently, though but I am aware of the case in the States. So we'll keep a watching brief on it.

*[Note that there was a question submitted in advance of the session that also asked South Staffs Water to confirm if the water was fluoridated or not]*





**Chair:** Thank you for that. There aren't any more questions in the chat. Any other kind of final questions before we finish?

**Response from participant:** Just to finish on a positive note. My mum is 86 and she's drank the water from the tap all of her life and she is fit and healthy, so just as a final uplifting point. She lives two doors away from me so, you know, I'm not actually making such a point but just really it's things I'm interested in. So just to leave you with that positive, uplifting comment.

**Chair:** Well we'll end it there then. So thank you very much for taking the time out to come and do this and spending some of your evening with us. As I say, we've made a note and a record of everything that has been said and we will send out a meeting report with all the questions and answers so that everybody has that. We will do that in the next few weeks. I think, just before we go, I was going to hand over to Andy just to say a few final words from the team at South Staffs?

**Closing remarks from speaker (Andy):** Just to echo what you've said, Rebecca, we really do appreciate our customers finding the time, showing the interest, giving us some helpful steers this evening on things that we should be thinking about. Apologies again to those customers that the service hasn't been as good as it should have been and please do follow up with Gary and let's get that all rectified. I appreciate, you know, we are not always front and centre of your daily lives, and we shouldn't be, and we try our best to work as hard as we can to deliver a service level that is of a really, really high standard. So thank you for your time. I appreciate the feedback. The team will take that and we will reflect accordingly, so it does add a lot of value. So many thanks and have a good evening.

## 7. Additional questions

Not all questions were asked or answered during the Zoom session. Those that were not part of the Zoom session are set out below:

**Question 15:** Why are you not asking the Government for compulsory meters, especially in new builds? Better than more reservoirs. But do you have any?

How do I find out our own daily usage. We are ideally allowed 100 litres per person per day to live in a sustainable way according to a recent article in the media.

**Answer 15:** Since 1990 all new build home built must have a water meter fitted by law. From 2025, South Staffs Water is starting a programme to fit a water meter at every property that does not currently have one, where it is possible to do so, over the next decade. Over 130,000 are planned to be fitted between 2025-2030, with the remainder by 2035. Alongside another large reduction of leakage levels, fitting these meters will play an important part of ensuring we have enough water to go around to meet human demand and ensure the environment is protected. You can



find out more here: <https://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/about-us/our-strategies-and-plans/our-water-resources-management-plan>

Water supplied to customers across the South Staffs region is taken from the River Severn, over 20 underground aquifers and a major reservoir which provides water to customers, you can find out more about it here: <https://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/environment/managing-water-resources/where-our-water-comes-from/>.

At this time we are not planning to increase the size of our Blithfield Reservoir, but this is an option that we can bring into our plans if the situation changes, e.g. we receive less rainfall over time, or demand for water rises quicker than forecast.

As you are a metered customer you can work out your usage from your recent water bills. On your bill, following a meter reading being taken, it will show you the amount of water used in meters cubed (m<sup>3</sup>). You can then convert this to litres - 1 cubic meters/day = 1,000 litres/day – to work out your daily usage. You can divide this by the number of people within your house to calculate your personal daily usage. The company is currently looking at the best ways to provide this information through an online portal, or similar, for customers to make it easy for them to track their water usage.

**Question 16:** Since moving to your supply region (Rocester, near Uttoxeter), we have found it necessary to use a water filter for drinking purposes. Is this usual or are you able to improve the quality.

**Answer 16:** Please see answer 1A above. We do have a number of schemes planned to improve the quality of the water across the region that are currently under construction or planned for 2025-2030. These may not benefit every single customer property, but they include upgrading treatment works to treat the changing raw water quality seen in our rivers and aquifers, cleaning our mains which are old and may cause discolouration during change of flows and our lead pipe replacement strategy.

**Question 17:** You have invited comments from your customers, here is mine. I understand you do not read water meters quarterly any longer. The problem is that to check my estimates I need to kneel down on the pavement to obtain a check reading. As we are both well into our 70s we no longer feel able to do this task. Also due to changes in regulations toilet overflows can now discharge into the toilet pan making faulty cisterns not so obvious. One of our neighbours lost £1800 as a result of the combination of those two unwelcome changes.

**Answer 17:** You are correct that the company no longer offers quarterly meter readings, this has been the case for over 10 years. Customers receive 1 actual meter reading a year taken by the company. We are currently undergoing an ambitious water meter programme to get full meter coverage across all properties in the next 10 years across the region we serve. As we install more smart meters we will get remote meter readings, which we can then pass through to customers via a portal or



APP service so they can track their usage. Appreciate though that is for the future, so will not help you now. One option we can suggest is signing up to the company's Priority Services Register (PSR) and the team can then set-up your account to provide you with two meter readings a year. Here is a link with more information about the [PSR service](#) and if that is something you would like to do. On your other point, yes, leaky loos can lead to notable leakage. One of the best ways to guard against this is to take advantage of the free solution we have on offer for our customers - called Leaky Loo strips. They are very easy to use and can help you spot any leaks into the pan from the cistern quickly. You can request these through our [Get Water Fit](#) service online once you have completed a registration form, or by contacting our customer service team [here](#).

**Question 18:** This is a great initiative by South Staffs Water and Cambridge Water. My question concerns how we are joined up with Severn Trent. Would it be possible to have a joint session with Severn Trent or perhaps ask Severn Trent to arrange their own zoom session? I have many questions regarding Severn Trent responsibilities and where responsibilities are not clear.

**Answer 18:** We have approached Severn Trent for a response on this. They held two Your water, your say sessions in 2023, but are not looking to hold any session in 2024. They are considering running sessions like these in the future for their customers and stakeholders. We will commit to discussing with Severn Trent the option of holding joint sessions. For now, if you want to engage with Severn Trent on-going about their wastewater services, responsibilities and investment plans, do please register to join their online community called [Tap Chat](#).

