

MINUTES OF THE DEVON REGIONAL WATERSHARE + PANEL MEETING (PUBLIC)

Sidmouth Methodist Church, Sidmouth

30 January 2025 at 10am for tours, 12.30 for lunch and 1pm for the meeting

Present: **Panel:**
 Nick Buckland OBE – WaterShare+ Panel Member and Regional Chair for Devon
 Dinah Cox OBE – WaterShare+ Panel Member and Regional Deputy Chair for Devon
 Peaches Golding OBE – WaterShare+ Panel Deputy Chair

In attendance: **Customer attendees:**
 37 customer attendees

Company representatives:
 Carolyn Cadman – Director of Natural Resources
 Ketan Hindocha – Director of Customer Care
 Sue Clarke – Head of Customer Research and Customer Strategy
 Lesley Horn – Customer Care and Resolution Manager

Meeting secretary:
 Sophie Hooper Lea of Ebonstone

Apologies: Lord Matthew Taylor – WaterShare+ Panel Chair

1.	Introduction to WaterShare+ (slides 4-8)	ACTION
1.1	Following tours of the Sidmouth Treatment Works and a lunch and networking session, Regional Chair Nick Buckland welcomed everyone to the first regional public meeting held by WaterShare+ in Devon, thanked them for attending and introduced himself. He provided background on the water industry and how it is regulated, and he highlighted the importance of customers being able to ask questions of the company.	
1.2	Nick Buckland went on to provide background on the WaterShare+ Panel and share scheme. He explained that WaterShare+ Panel covers all of the company's regions but that each region has a Chair and Deputy Chair to champion local issues. Nick introduced Dinah Cox, Deputy Chair for Devon and Peaches Golding, Deputy Chair of the WaterShare+ Panel. The WaterShare+ Panel is recognised by Ofwat as the company's independent challenge group (ICG) and holds the company to account on behalf of customers.	
1.3	After explaining the Panel's recent and upcoming areas of focus, Nick Buckland handed over to Carolyn Cadman, Director of Natural Resources for South West Water.	
2.	Welcome from South West Water (slides 10-21)	ACTION
2.1	Carolyn Cadman welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of South West Water. She described her background in the charitable and public sector, including her former role as Chief Executive of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust. Carolyn provided background information on South West Water and other Pennon Group companies.	
2.2	Carolyn Cadman then described her work on upstream thinking and catchment management, which involves working with landowners, farmers and a range of other organisations on nature-based solutions, and the company's focus on renewable energy generation.	

2.3	Thereafter, Carolyn Cadman talked about the company's investment in the local area (slides 14-16) and the environmental challenges of fatbergs (slides 17-21)	
2.4	Carolyn Cadman handed over to Dinah Cox for the question and answer session.	
3.	Questions and Answers	ACTION
3.1	Dinah Cox welcomed customers to the meeting and invited questions from attendees, noting that it is extremely important for customers to have the opportunity to ask questions of company executives and raise any concerns.	Company
3.2	<p>Customer 1 asked about the quantity in litres of excess waste and other water is discharged into the sea at Sidmouth via CSOs? Jenny Eamer responded that the company monitors spills in terms of when they occur and how long they last, noting that CSO discharges are comprised of around 2-5% sewage (also noting that the discharge has been allowed to settle and has also been screened, which removes bigger particles) and 95-98% rainwater and other sources of water, meaning that the sewage is very diluted. She noted that flow meters measure the flow into the works and the quantities of storage and treated wastewater, but that she is not able to provide a figure for the amount of liquid discharged by CSOs. Jenny Eamer and Carolyn Cadman also provided some context on the value of upstream thinking instead of simply building additional storage tanks and the SWW commitment of a maximum of 10 storm overflows per year by 2040.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to respond to customer 1 and the Panel with regard to whether data is available or can be calculated for the volume of waste and/or other water discharged into the sea by CSOs in Sidmouth and elsewhere. If unavailable, the response should include an explanation of why it cannot be provided. 	
3.3	Customer 2 asked why the company doesn't treat CSO discharges with ultraviolet. Jenny Eamer explained that some wastewater treatment sites have storm UV but that it can be problematic as storm water generally has more solid particles in it because of high concentrations of run off, so the UV lights get dirty and then work less well. The ideal solution is to reduce rainwater and other run off from the system so it doesn't overwhelm the wastewater treatment works and trigger a storm overflow.	
3.4	<p>Customer 3 was also concerned about the issue raised by Customer 1 that the company is not measuring its outflows. He asked when the work to reduce storm overflows will happen in Sidmouth because people have not been told about dates yet. He would like to know specific plans for each locality including the volume and concentration of storm overflows. Jenny Eamer stated that the company does not have monitors that can provide the answer to the volume and concentration of storm overflows, but that the company will be putting in river quality monitors upstream and downstream of every overflow, which will help to answer the question about the impact of storm overflows on rivers. This is for rivers only and not for overflows into the sea. Jenny stated that dates for local plans can be provided by the company's asset management team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to make plans and dates available to local customers for its upcoming work to reduce storm overflows in Sidmouth in 2025-30. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to provide details to the Panel on whether there are monitors that could assess the volume and/or concentration of storm overflows or whether this is an industry shortfall. 	
3.5	Customer 4 asked about improvements to Salcombe Regis wastewater treatment work, saying that it had been discharging onto a bathing beach (albeit not a designated one) regularly in 2023. Jenny Eamer responded that the company has done some of the work already, including adding CCTV. She noted that a lot of work is needed on infiltration and it makes sense for the company to tackle infiltration first as a priority before then turning attention to how best to improve the treatment works.	
3.6	<p>Customer 5 asked whether the company conducted any float testing when the CSO and outflow were put in at Sidmouth beach? The company had told him that no float testing has been undertaken since the two rock islands were built as a sea defence, but he believes that this has affected the tidal flow and is bringing discharge back towards the beach. He noted that a new rock island is being put in and SWW should conduct tidal float testing for the new rock island. He also stated that testing is only conducted for four months per year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to respond to customer 5 with regard to any float testing undertaken by the company and whether SWW will undertake float testing in relation to the new rock island on Sidmouth beach. Company to clarify whether testing is only conducted for four months per year and, if so, why. 	Company
3.7	<p>Customer 6 said that, during the tour of the Sidmouth Wastewater Treatment Works, he was told that all the sludge from the site goes to Countess Weir sludge treatment and then all goes to land. Is it the case that all of the sludge from Countess Weir ends up on agricultural land? He noted that there are severe restrictions on farmers re how they can use sludge (and their own slurry) on their land because of high quantities of heavy metals etc. Jenny Eamer explained that the vast majority of sludge is treated at the company's sludge treatment works and is treated to an agreed standard that includes removing E. coli etc. If the sludge cannot be treated to that standard then the other options are landfill and incineration. Jenny noted that the company is looking at its sludge strategy going forwards and that legislation on this may be changing. Sludge from Sidmouth goes to Countess Weir sludge treatment works and then, if necessary, for further treatment at Tiverton. These treatment works treat the sludge to a standard that means it can go to land. It is Jenny's understanding that 100% of sludge treated effectively at these works goes to land. The customer highlighted that their particular area of concern is heavy metal contamination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to provide the Panel with a briefing on sludge treatment, use and storage, the company's approach and possible changes to the sludge strategy including potential legislation and its impacts. Company to respond in writing to customer 6 to confirm whether 100% of effectively treated sludge goes to land; whether heavy metals are removed by treatment and, if not, what happens to sludge that contains heavy metals. 	Company Company
3.8	Customer 7 asked if any region of the UK still dumps sludge at sea? Jenny Eamer responded that this practice has completely stopped because of legislation. No sludge is dumped by at sea by UK water companies.	

3.9	<p>Customer 8 was concerned about sludge on land. To what extent does SWW prepare a site before the arrival of the sludge? Jenny Eamer noted that there is a team within SWW that looks at where sludge is held. Sludge is classed as a waste product and there is therefore a significant amount of legislation on this that SWW must adhere too. SWW are responsible for sludge from cradle to grave and the SWW team work with farmers and the sludge storage providers to adhere to legislation. The customer was still concerned about the potential for seepage of sludge out of storage sites and back into watercourses, particularly as rainfall is increasing significantly due to climate change. Jenny noted that sludge storage has to have impermeable layers and also reiterated that the company may need to change its strategy in future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to produce an explainer for interested/concerned customers on the company's approach to sludge treatment, use and storage. 	Company
3.10	<p>Customer 9 asked about biodiversity. Given that SWW cannot monitor biodiversity on all the rivers in its regions, can the company work in partnership with other organisations to do that? For example, volunteers are working on issues such as the control of invasive species in the River Sid, but they are volunteers and could the company help? The customer also mentioned the problems caused by Japanese Knotweed. Carolyn Cadman responded that Ofwat has allowed SWW quite a significant amount of money to control the spread of invasive species but that this funding has to be spent on SWW sites, which cover 6,000 hectares of the areas served by the company. This includes work on American crayfish and Japanese Knotweed. The company also runs awareness raising events and training and has worked with Sidmouth biodiversity group. Carolyn also highlighted that SWW can't monitor biodiversity across the whole region but does measure it on Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The company is also required to deliver a net gain in biodiversity of its sites in the next business plan period of 2025-30. She also highlighted the company's involvement and data sharing with partners such as NGOs. Carolyn asked the customer to swap contact details with her after the meeting.</p>	
3.11	<p>Customer 10 noted the importance of tackling Himalayan Balsam.</p>	
3.12	<p>Customer 11 was concerned with SWW's strategy re the planning of new developments. A major development of c. 300 homes is being planned in Sidmouth and SWW were consultees with the local authority almost totally relying on the expertise of SWW on this. The customer was of the opinion that SWW's initial and subsequent response was completely wrong. The customer stated that he had asked SWW time and time again to do a capacity test on the sewer in times of rain. The run off goes into a stream behind his house, which causes flooding. SWW has said that the run off for the major development will not go into the combined sewer, but this needs to be looked at properly and needs to be done properly. The developer should be responsible for run off from their development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to organise a presentation for the Panel by members of the company's planning team to explain the company's approach to consultations with regard to new housing developments. Company to report back to the Panel with regard to the Sidmouth development in the light of customer concerns about SWW's responses to the planning consultations. Company to also report back to customer 11, if their name can be ascertained. 	<p>Company</p> <p>Company</p>

3.13	Customer 12 stated that developments should be 15m from a watercourse and that environmental impact studies are not robust enough. Carolyn responded that the local authority takes planning decisions and decides on environmental impact studies.	
3.14	Customer 13 agreed with customer 11 that SWW's response to the original planning application was wrong in so many ways that it was clear there was insufficient due diligence. (See actions for 3.12 above.)	
3.15	<p>Customer 14 asked about the company's approach to upstream thinking and asked whether the work in the Otter Valley has had any impact on the water quality in the Dotton bore hole. Carolyn responded that she doesn't know of any plans for a bore hole in the Sid Valley. She talked about the University of Exeter's work with the company on upstream thinking including burying unused underpants to judge how healthy the soil is by how quickly the pants degrade! This provoked a lot of interest from customers and the Panel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company to provide more information for customers and the Panel on the University of Exeter's research into soil health with the use of underpants. See appendix below for details and photos. • Company to provide further information to the Panel when the University of Exeter reports back on its soil health research project. 	<p>See appendix below</p> <p>Company</p>
3.16	<p>Customer 15 highlighted an issue with WaterFit Live. He had to zoom in five times to see the CSOs in Sidmouth because they were obscured by the images of beach umbrellas for the bathing beaches. He suggested this could be easily fixed by putting the blue umbrella layer underneath the CSO layer in the map.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company to address the issue highlighted by customer 15 with regard to having to zoom in to find details of CSOs on WaterFit live. Company to report back to the Panel on this and to provide details to customer, if name can be ascertained. 	Company
3.17	<p>Customer 16 stated that there are several CSOs at the Ham and that the marine discharge is visible on WaterFit Live but he cannot find the discharges at the mouth of the River Sid. Water UK has the data correctly displayed so why doesn't SWW do it in the same way?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company to investigate and respond to customer 16 with regard to whether discharges at the mouth of the River Sid are visible on WaterFit Live. Company to respond to the customer if their name can be ascertained and also to the Panel. 	Company
3.18	<p>Customer 17 said that his meter had not been read for two years and that his bills for that time period have been based on estimated readings. He asked why this was the case. Ketan Hindocha responded that the company should be reading meters twice a year and promised to look into this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company to contact customer 17 with regard to him highlighting that his water meter has not be read for two years and also provide an explanation to the Panel. 	Company

3.19	Customer 18 just wanted to highlight that it is really easy to contact the company about bills and the customer contact line works really well. The Panel thanked the customer for their comment.	
3.20	<p>Customer 19 stated that his water meter is 200m from his house and on the side of a main road and often parked on by cars. Can it be moved to outside his house? It shouldn't be on the roadside. Lesley Horn highlighted that meters are located at the end of external stop pipes and that the rest of the piping is the customer's responsibilities. The customer stated that he has contacted the company repeatedly about this but with no success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to contact customer 19 with regard to his water meter being located 200m from his house on the side of a main road. Even if this is the customer's responsibility, the customer still needs advice on how to resolve the situation. 	Company
3.21	<p>Customer 20 stated that the main isolating valve in the road goes into a pipe that runs into someone else's property. That pipe belongs to the other people but they have responsibility for me getting the water. SWW think that because it feeds three bungalows it should be shared responsibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to contact customer 20 and investigate his concerns about responsibilities for a pipe that runs into someone else's property. Even if this is not SWW's responsibility, the customer still needs advice on how to resolve the situation. 	Company
3.22	<p>Customer 21 complimented SWW on the phenomenal amount of work that has been required of them by Ofwat. He also praised Ben Harnam, who ran one of the two site tours. At the end of the event, another customer praised the other tour leader – Terry Hartnell, manager of the Sidmouth WWTW site. He asked for his compliments to be passed on to Terry too.</p> <p>Customer 21 also expressed confusion about the company's use of the phrases 'Be you. Be rock solid. Be the future'. Carolyn Cadman responded that these are company values that explain what the company's expectations are for its employees. All staff are expected to hold themselves, their leaders and their teams to account on this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company to pass on customers' thanks to Ben Harnam and Terry Hartnell for leading interesting and informative tours of Sidmouth Wastewater Treatment Works. 	Company
3.23	Customer 22 highlighted some text that had suggested that the company focuses on biodiversity because it is important to customers. He said it should be much more fundamental than that and, even if customers didn't care, the company should. The Panel and company agreed that biodiversity is incredibly important.	
3.24	Customer 23 stated that fatbergs need to be publicised on TV and that the company is preaching to the converted at this event, but that other people need to know about these issues. Can SWW put things on Spotlight occasionally? And also make clear how to dispose of things like wet wipes and cooking fat that shouldn't be put down the drain.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company's communications team to look into how to further promote the problems of fatbergs and the responsible disposal by household customers of wet wipes, cooking fat and other items that cause problems in sewers. 	Company
3.25	Customer 24 asked if our water is safe to drink. Peaches Golding responded that the Drinking Water Inspectorate's standards are extremely high and that customers can rest assured that their water is safe to drink. She pointed out that the UK has some of the best tap water in the world.	
3.26	Dinah thanked attendees for their questions, noted that the company would respond to unanswered questions and invited attendees to ask further questions after the event if needed. She then handed over to Peaches Golding to close the meeting.	
4.	Thank you and close	ACTION
4.1	Peaches thanked attendees for their questions and feedback. She also thanked the company representatives for their answers and their work in supporting the Panel to host this and other public meetings. She also highlighted that the commitments made by water companies for 2025-2030 will provide the largest investment ever in the UK in environmental improvements.	

Appendix: Burying underpants to understand soil health

The quality and health of soil can impact on the quality of water passing through a catchment and into bore holes.

As a way of engaging farmers on the importance of soil health, the Westcountry Rivers Trust worked with farmers to bury five pairs of organic white cotton pants in five locations. The pants were 98% organic cotton, the other 2% being elastic.

The healthier the soil, the quicker the cotton would bio-degrade.

More information about the activity can be found here <https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/south-west-water-tells-farmers-1143232>



Photo 1 – pants used in the trial



Photo 2 – pants buried in not so healthy soil



Photo 3 - pants buried in healthy soil (only the elastic is left)

MINUTES OF THE DEVON REGIONAL WATERSHARE + PANEL MEETING (PUBLIC)
30 January 2025

Actions/Matters Arising

Action No	Meeting Date	Ref	Action	Owner	Comment / Target date
571	30/01/25	3.2	Company to respond to customer 1 and the Panel with regard to whether data is available or can be calculated for the volume of waste and/or other water discharged into the sea by CSOs in Sidmouth and elsewhere. If	Company	

			unavailable, the response should include an explanation of why it cannot be provided.		
572	30/01/25	3.4	Company to make plans and dates available to local customers for its upcoming work to reduce storm overflows in Sidmouth in 2025-30.	Company	
573	30/01/25	3.4	Company to provide details to the Panel on whether there are monitors that could assess the volume and/or concentration of storm overflows or whether this is an industry shortfall.	Company	
574	30/01/25	3.6	Company to respond to customer 5 with regard to any float testing undertaken by the company and whether SWW will undertake float testing in relation to the new rock island on Sidmouth beach. Company to clarify whether testing is only conducted for four months per year and, if so, why.	Company	
575	30/01/25	3.7	Company to provide the Panel with a briefing on sludge treatment, use and storage, the company's approach and possible changes to the sludge strategy including potential legislation and its impacts.	Company	
576	30/01/25	3.7	Company to respond in writing to customer 6 to confirm whether 100% of effectively treated sludge goes to land; whether heavy metals are removed by treatment and, if not, what happens to sludge that contains heavy metals.	Company	
577	30/01/25	3.9	Company to produce an explainer for interested/concerned customers on the company's approach to sludge treatment, use and storage.	Company	
578	30/01/25	3.12	Company to organise a presentation for the Panel by members of the company's planning team to explain the company's approach to consultations with regard to new housing developments.	Company	
579	30/01/25	3.12	Company to report back to the Panel with regard to the Sidmouth development in the light of customer concerns about SWW's responses to the planning consultations. Company to also report back to customer 11, if their name can be ascertained.	Company	
580	30/01/25	3.15	Company to provide more information for customers and the Panel on the University of Exeter's research into soil health with the use of underpants.	Company	Completed – included as appendix in meeting minutes
581	30/01/25	3.15	Company to provide further information to the Panel when the University of Exeter	Company	

			reports back on its soil health research project.		
582	30/01/25	3.16	Company to address the issue highlighted by customer 15 with regard to having to zoom in to find details of CSOs on WaterFit live. Company to report back to the Panel on this and to provide details to customer, if name can be ascertained.	Company	
583	30/01/25	3.17	Company to investigate and respond to customer 16 with regard to whether discharges at the mouth of the River Sid are visible on WaterFit Live. Company to respond to the customer if their name can be ascertained and also to the Panel.	Company	
584	30/01/25	3.18	Company to contact customer 17 with regard to him highlighting that his water meter has not be read for two years and also provide an explanation to the Panel.	Company	
585	30/01/25	3.20	Company to contact customer 19 with regard to his water meter being located 200m from his house on the side of a main road. Even if this is the customer's responsibility, the customer still needs advice on how to resolve the situation.	Company	
586	30/01/25	3.21	Company to contact customer 20 and investigate his concerns about responsibilities for a pipe that runs into someone else's property. Even if this is not SWW's responsibility, the customer still needs advice on how to resolve the situation.	Company	
587	30/01/25	3.22	Company to pass on customers' thanks to Ben Harnam and Terry Hartnell for leading interesting and informative tours of Sidmouth Wastewater Treatment Works.	Company	
588	30/01/25	3.24	Company's communications team to look into how to further promote the problems of fatbergs and the responsible disposal by household customers of wet wipes, cooking fat and other items that cause problems in sewers.	Company	