

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water Vulnerability Conference

17th July 2025

Post Event Summary



Introduction

Rebecca Price - Customer Services Director

The aim for today is to provide an informative experience over the next few hours. The programme encourages the formation of new connections and the strengthening of existing relationships. Collaboration is considered essential for achieving objectives and supporting individuals in need within communities, recognising the collective contribution towards assisting vulnerable populations across Wales.

The 2025 conference will commence with a brief video from Jane Hatt, Secretary for Social Justice.

Video Message from Jane Hutt MS, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice

I was grateful to the opportunity to share a message to mark the launch of Dwr Cymru latest vulnerability strategy. I very much thank Dwr Cymru and Industrial partners for your fruitful and collaborative efforts that have led to the delivery of this publication. This spirit to togetherness allows us to take holistic approach to some of the biggest problems facing us today, and ensures the voices of everyone, including Welsh consumers, are heard, and given due consideration. The Welsh government is committed to helping people in the most vulnerable circumstances, and will continue to work closely with stakeholders, to achieve fair and affordable access to water and sewage services for all customers. Our collective efforts via Ofwat's price review means that Wales's water companies and committed to significantly increasing their social tariff schemes.

And these schemes, as they roll out, will go a long way in boosting support of maximising outreach to the ones who need it. Safeguarding the most vulnerable in our communities forms the cornerstone of our work, and it was pleasing to see how much of this strategy aligns with the principles of inclusivity and accessibility. I welcome the strategy's focus on championing these principles, which have been designed to accommodate the diverse needs of Welsh consumers.

As the world moves online, we must stay mindful of those who have not adapted to this new norm, and eliminate digital barriers, wherever possible, the Welsh Government's digital strategy for Wales aims to equip people with the motivation, competence, and basic digital skills needed to participate in this increasingly digital age. Nevertheless, we will also seek to ensure that tradition of offline alternatives to

those who cannot or do not wish to make that transition. And the Welsh government will continue to play a pivotal role in supporting people across Wales who cost of living pressures, investing over £7 billion since 2022, in wide ranging schemes that support the people that need it most. Rest assured, the initiatives we developed together, really do culminate in meaningful effective change. last four years has seen Dwr Cymru's priority Services register more than trebled from 80,000 to over 275,000 customers today. This means that more customers than ever before are getting the extra help they need. I'd just like to end by thank you all once again for your contributions in ensuring access to a safe and dependable waters supply under privileged communities. Empowering our most vulnerable and delivering the quality of service they expect and deserve, must be at the heart of everything we do, and at events like today serve to help make that a reality. Thank you.

Kit Wilson Director for Customer and Developer Services, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water

A big thank you to a minister for that opening. My name is Kit Wilson; I'm the director for Customer Services here at Dwr Cymru and a warm welcome to our offices today. I just want to say it's lovely to see so many different organisations represented here today, but it's also lovely to be able to welcome you to our actual offices to hold this event this year. It is normally held in large hotels in the past and I think bringing organisations and colleagues and stakeholders into Welsh Water will hopefully bring to life even more for services that we provide. Today is about learning and sharing across all our partnerships, but I'm going to start by bringing to life our new vulnerability strategy. So, with just a bit of background we launched our original vulnerability strategy in 2018 and over the last couple of years, we've been working hard to update it for the next 5 years, so setting our vulnerability strategy up until 2025. In October we Submitted our new 5-year plan to Ofwat and re received lots of feedback on it.

We had lots of things we've hadn't included, things that we could improve on, and you know, it's probably fair to say we didn't do our vulnerability service justice through that submission.

Since October, we have worked really hard to update the strategy, we've engaged with stakeholders, lots of people from within the room, we've engaged with regulators, with our independent challenge group and we've engaged with customers. We've taken on board that feedback, and we drafted our revised strategy, which we then engaged with again, to get feedback on, does this hit the mark, does this meet the improvement that's required? And that culminated in us submitting our draft to or a final submission on the 30th of June this year to Ofwat, and we're really proud of that that submission.

However, in that time, so in the last year, a huge amount has changed, the whole landscape, terms of the vulnerability service that we provide has changed. You'll all be aware of this, but we've got now a new Westminster government. There's even more global turbulence, which brings more pressure, particularly financial pressures for our customers. And there is an even more greater increasing focus on water sector. You'll all be seeing the media pressure, the focus nationally, the political pressure on the water sector. That culminated in a record level of investment in the water sector. So that level of investment over the next five years, right across the country in the UK, will improve environmental outcomes for all customers. So, on one hand, that is positive. Welsh Water as an example, we'll be spending 2.5 billion on improving environmental outcomes for our customers, and that's absolutely needed. We're really committed to that, but we need to understand what that means is a significant increase in the cost of our bills, and that is a concerning matter for a lot of our customers, particularly vulnerable for customers, and therefore, our vulnerable strategy need has never been more important. It is never more important for us to be able to support those customers that most need in Wales, given all that backdrop so the concerns about the wider economy, the concerns about the cost of our bills, energy bills, etc. And that's why this strategy for the next five years is fundamental to the service that we deliver in Wales.

The approach we taken, in the previous strategy was to create a big, long document, which we publish, and if I'm honest, probably most people didn't read in full because it was a very detailed document.

We've created two documents this time around, one being our full documented strategy with all of the detail around how we will support customers in Wales. But we've also created an executive summary, so this is a three-page document summarises the overall detail with Jody on the front, who is one of our partnership engagement officers, and that summary document is three pages long, easily read, and both are available on our website and in print. The way we structured it is we split the strategy into four areas, and I'll touch on to summarise them, Data and insight, accessible support, training and awareness, and communities and partnership.

And that will be the bedrock of the vulnerability service that we provide in Dwr Cymru, but that really important point and the big difference between this strategy and the one we created in 2018 is this is an iterative approach. We will be reviewing this every year, getting feedback from a stakeholder, such as yourselves, from our customers, on the following.

- The service we're providing is meeting the needs that is set out to.
- Whether anything has changed in terms of the provision that we need to provide.
- Whether there's anything else we need to consider, whether our ambitions, our targets were right when we set them, should they be greater? Is there a need that we hadn't thought of or wasn't required when we first drafted strategy?

So, each year will be reviewing the strategy and updating it, which is a significant change to the way that we've developed the strategy in the past. I'll touch on a few numbers to start with. The minister did a good job of plugging our priority services register as she mentioned, we have nearly 300,000 customers now. I'm sure most of you know what our priority services registers, but at anyone that doesn't, that's the register we report the needs alternative support require for each customer. So, to bring that life, if we have an incident where we have a loss of water supply certain area, we can make sure that customers on the PSR are not in situation without updates or possible alternative water supplies. There are lots of different needs, how we communicate with our customers on our priority services register, that brings to light, how the concept works.

So that's in 20% of our current customer base registered, that's where we're around now over the next five years, we'll take that to 25%. And I think we will get closer to 30% over the next over the next five years. We also offer a huge amount of financial support. So, the unique model of the company, the fact that we are not for profit, what would be a profit, is that it's reinvested back into our customers. About £30 million every year gets reinvested into our tariffs to support customers that most need it. Currently we support over 150,000 customers through some form of financial assistance scheme; to bring that to life, we have 1.4 million households. So that's a high proportion to customers that we support, and we are one of the highest levels of support across the water sector.

Our support covers things like our help you tariff, where you get a cap on your bill based on your circumstances. We offer our Customer Assistance Fund, which in turns rights off large amount of debt to customers who have been struggling or fallen behind on their bills with us. Over the next five years, we will uplift that to 180,000 customers. That's our state of ambition, that's what we're heading to. We've seen, and through our engagements and the level of demand since our bill increases have landed, a big uplift already in customers looking for support and being able to get one of your social tariffs in the last 6 months.

One of the key areas of feedback that you had around our strategy was how are we using data to better provide a tailored service to customers in Wales. And this really summarises how we're doing. So we have an already had in base, a really good data sharing agreement with partners, so that our DNO's where we share our priority service data, and they do with us, and that allows us to increase the level of customers we have on our priority services register, we will absolutely be doing more of that the next five years. We will also meet and using data to monitor and measure how satisfied customers are with the service that we provide. We already do this, the customer service itself always has exceedingly high levels of customer experience over 9 out of 10, and we will continue to use tools such as speech analytics to monitor that daily and make sure the service we're providing is meeting the needs of our customers. But one of the big changes that we're making over the next five years, we've already started doing that, is using a data model that maps and the deprivation index in Wales against social targets. It's looking at where have we got high

levels of deprivation and where have we not got high levels of social tariff uptake. Those two things should obviously match and if we've got an area at a lower level than average uptake, in an area that has high deprivation, we need to be doing more for our partnership team.

We need to reach out and we're doing this with those areas to make sure that we provide awareness and support to those who need it most. Data is key to how we take forward this fund this instruction over the next five years.

The next pillar addresses accessible support, focusing on ensuring services meet various accessibility requirements and accommodate diverse needs. Communication with customers, particularly during times of financial or operational stress such as supply interruptions, is considered an important aspect. The approach includes evaluating whether communication methods are understandable and accessible—whether in written correspondence, emails, verbal interactions, or through formats like multiple languages, braille audio, and easy read materials.

Plans are in place to expand these efforts over the next five years, led by two key teams: the vulnerability team at the Linea office, which interacts with customers daily and provides support across different service areas; and the partner engagement team, which collaborates with partner organisations within the community to deliver support and training.

Digital accessibility is also highlighted, acknowledging the increasing use of the website as a customer channel. The accessibility of the site has been rated double A+ and was recently recognised for its performance within the utility sector. Maintaining and enhancing these standards remains a focus for the coming years.

A new strategy is being implemented to extend support to business customers who serve vulnerable populations, including care homes, hospitals, and charities. The aim is to ensure these organisations receive adequate assistance to continue providing their essential services.

The next area is training, and this is one, the team are proud of. Everyone in Welsh water that is frontline that operates within our customer facing roles, has vulnerability training. We've trained over a thousand colleagues on face-to-face basis in the last 12 months, and that's the feedback we get on that training is fantastic, our team feel more confident in supporting and providing a better service to all. As part of, we have our ISO accreditation for our vulnerability service. But in addition to that, we do things like monthly teach stores, these involve our partner organisations coming to us to talk about the service they offer and how we can both work better together to support and understand many different types of customers.

Our strategy's final focus is community and partnership engagement. Each year, we collaborate with over 300 partners across Wales and are committed to maintaining these relationships. Adopting a holistic approach, we support our customers by developing new clusters—collaborations with agencies in different regions. For example, in Cardigan, we're upgrading the water network, improving the environment, and working closely with local partners to address any vulnerabilities and impacts. We also offer a community fund to support local groups, reaffirming our commitment for the next five years.

What are our next steps? The strategy will continue to develop as we engage with customers, colleagues, and communities. This process is iterative, and your feedback is highly valued; it will be incorporated into future versions of the strategy. Next year, we will assess and implement necessary updates. Feedback is essential to ensure our approach remains aligned with our core purpose of meeting community needs. If, after the first year, we find that an original objective does not serve this purpose, we will adjust based on your input and insights. Being here today provide us with an opportunity to develop learn and grow.



Steven Donovan, OVO Energy

It is a pleasure to be here today and to hear Kit emphasise our shared objectives, particularly regarding how we can enhance support for customers who may require additional assistance. By examining our processes from the customer's perspective, we can identify meaningful improvements. I have been invited to speak today on Data.

I love data and how we use that is so important to understand where and what we do. We have seen the huge price increase and the turbulence of the energy market within the last few years. With the introduction of the price cap from the government it has supported and shielded some of the costs to our customers. But looking at some stats we have currently show that almost 6 million homes across the UK are in energy poverty.

I'll be looking at today 2 case studies, Our own PSR (Priority register) and our placed based program.

PSR is a standardized method of collecting data on the customer base identified as vulnerable, in order to better understand their needs and provide appropriate support. Over the past two years, the register has grown by 300,000 customers. Currently, more than 1.3 million customers are supported through the PSR, which exceeds the total customer base of some energy companies. Consideration for these individuals is incorporated into daily operations.

We provide adaptive communication solutions for all of our customers. Recognising the different types of customer needs is essential to ensuring our services are inclusive for everyone. It is a common misconception that vulnerable individuals do not utilise digital platforms or access our online services; however, this is not the case. It is encouraging to see Welsh Water prioritising digital accessibility throughout the customer journey. Over the past year, we have observed online billing among PSR customers increase from 3,000 to 21,000 accounts. We have also seen our adaptive bills, like easy read or braille grow from 5000 to 24000.

We are using AI at OVO to better identify and respond to customer vulnerability. While AI is still developing, we ensure it is used thoughtfully to understand customer needs without losing human connection. Our AI supports teams in promoting PSR, detecting vulnerabilities, and enhancing customer service.

We also use our Support Hub powered by Experian. This service provides that one tell option and allow Experian to share that information with all different types of creditors. It allows that customer to just say once and the right action to be taken and making it easier for all customers to disclose their needs.

Launched in October 2022, OVO's extra support package invested £150 million to provide direct financial aid to around 100,000 customers, helping reduce fuel poverty. Approximately 90% of those seeking financial support are also enrolled in our PSR.

Using our extensive data, we've expanded our place-based program by mapping Wales in various ways. This helps us identify target areas and provide tailored support for different types of homes and customers.

Only 42% trust energy companies for objective sustainable energy advice, so we aimed to build trust using community initiatives. We launched our OVO hub in Newport, partnering with organizations like Welsh Water for a holistic approach. Newport was chosen due to higher unemployment (4.1% vs. 3.1% Wales average), 7,000 customers, 33% PSR reach (above average), and low home EPC ratings, making it an ideal location to pilot our hub. We rely on trusted community members to raise awareness of the hub, rather than promoting it directly. We do not sell and provide that support to customers who are not even with OVO.

We have enrolled out this scheme to Glasgow, Bristol and Inverness with more to come. Some key figures from our place-based program below

- 1767 families supported last winter
- 61% of households had income of less than £17k
- 85% are worried about the cost of energy
- 25% had never heard of PSR
- 98% think more positive about OVO

Currently, more than 16 partners participate in these hubs, offering support from organizations such as the police, council, and various utility providers.

Helen Hancock, Bipolar UK

Making services more accessible for people with bipolar

What is bipolar? Bipolar is a severe mental illness (SMI) characterized by extreme mood swings and changes in energy levels. Someone with bipolar can have long or short periods of stability but can then go 'low' (into deep depression) or 'high' (experiencing hypomania, mania or psychosis). Bipolar mood swings go far beyond most people's everyday experiences of feeling a bit down or happy.

To help explain the extremes of mood, Bipolar UK uses a Mood Scale where 0 is low and 10 is high.

People can experience changes within a snap and the period within each change in mood can differ by each person. I recently spoke with someone who has been managing their condition for 13 years until recently they relapsed and have now been hospitalized and are now trying to piece their life back together again.

Currently over 50,000 people have bipolar in Wales. About 1 in 50 people in Wales live with Bipolar. That's more than the number of people who live with dementia or have learning difficulties. Bipolar is one of the biggest mental health challenges of the 21st century as it accounts for almost 17% of the total burden on mental health with approx. 2% of the population dealing with someone or living with Bipolar.

On average it takes 11.9 years in Wales to get a diagnosis of Bipolar. Compared with 9.4 years in England. About 50% of people with bipolar will relapse each year and more than half have been hospitalized with their bipolar. People with bipolar face significant health disparities, with higher rates of obesity and a 10 to 15-year reduction in life expectancy

Issues for people with bipolar and their families

- Withdrawal and isolation
- Hypomania or mania
- Suicidal thinking
- Loss of mental capacity
- Impulsive behaviors
- Overspending
- Financial hardship
- Paranoia
- Stress triggers
- Difficulty with emotional regulation
- Co-morbidities such as anxiety or other mental health conditions

If you think about Bipolar, people who have it, will struggle with holding down a job, being able to manage and deal with their financial affairs. You will also find things difficult as many people will self-isolate and stay away from the interactions and the community. Bipolar UK provides peer support groups, Peer support line, online community conversations, self-management course and advocacy. Within Wales we offer in person support in Cardiff, Pontypridd and Swansea. Online we offer support across, Abergele, Brecon, Bridgend, Cwmbran, Dolgellau, Tenby, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil and Wrexham

We also have some upcoming services coming to Carmarthen, Prestatyn and a scheme to cover all of Wales online and via our support line.

We are proud to have Heston Blumenthal as our ambassador, who has spoken openly and candidly about his experiences living with bipolar disorder.

Effective and empathetic communication with individuals who may experience challenges is important, particularly during disruptions such as loss of supply or water. Clear messaging helps ensure that essential information reaches affected customers. For example, individuals living with bipolar disorder may face limitations in accessing alternative water sources if their supply is interrupted and they do not have external support.

You can get more information by visiting www.bipolaruk.org or call 03333233885

Chaz Hampton, Wales Council for Deaf People

The Deaf Community in Wales – Statistics (Interpreter speaks for Chaz as he signs)

My name is Charles or Chaz and I'm here representing Wales council for deaf people. I'm here to look at ways of raising awareness about things in relation to the deaf community. My role is to go out to the community and work with organizations like this to work together to bring more support to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. A lot has changed post Covid, a lot of older deaf people and clubs have disappeared, and more people are looking to the deaf council for support.

Approximately 575,000 people in Wales—about one in five—are Deaf or hard of hearing. This includes culturally deaf individuals, members of the deaf community, those who are hard of hearing, people using lip-reading or sign language, and individuals who are deafblind and may require additional support.

A Welsh Government report estimates that there are between 5,600 and 7,300 British Sign Language users in Wales, which accounts for approximately 0.18 percent to 0.23 percent of the Welsh population

BSL does not have the legal status or support of Welsh and English, leaving deaf BSL users in Wales doubly disadvantaged by both spoken languages. Deaf people have a lower employment rate than the national average

Research indicates that, on average, deaf students complete compulsory education with a reading level comparable to that of 8-year-olds (Rowley, 2023) and are less likely to achieve GCSEs compared to the national average (Wilks & O'Neill, 2022).

With sign language being a language of its own, it's difficult for people of the deaf community to gain the same level of support when it comes to attending appointments with doctors, hospital and other organisations. BSL, which is a language in its own right. visual, gestural language. We communicate through your hands, our bodies, our faces, and quite often rely on interpreters from communication. Currently there are no deaf only schools. So, we might go to a main Street school, a partial hearing unit, and you'd be maybe listening, listening effectively through as CSW communication support worker. But their language level would be quite low in sign language or maybe at level one, level two, and that's the level of language the child is getting. Ideally, it should be level three or even level six. In level six is what you need for interpreter training. But if you think these children, these children are accessing education through this lower level of language, so

they never achieve good results. They might leave schooled at the age of 16, 18, 20 and the English reading level is at the age of an eight-year-old.

Communication is challenging when language access is limited, making it hard for children to succeed in school or find jobs. At job interviews, they are often told interpreters aren't available due to time or staffing shortages. The scarcity of interpreters in Wales further complicates getting necessary support.

At times we must wait weeks for the support we need to get basic communication. We get told that there is no service available to help and many places will just write things down and expect us to understand, but again, English is not our first language so this could again frustrate or delay the support we need.

People in the deaf community struggle with things like transport, health and education. We can't call the doctor when unwell, we need to wait for the interpreter, and this can delay medical support that many need.

Some key stats around the deaf community in Wales

- Deaf BSL signers generally experience worse health outcomes due to limited access to healthcare services (Emond et al., 2015b)
- Deaf BSL signers in Wales are twice as likely to experience mental health problems compared to hearing people, but there are no specialist deaf or BSL mental health services available.
- There is also a shortage of BSL interpreters and translators compounding the issues deaf BSL signers experience as citizens of Wales.
- The BSL Act 2022 came into force on 28 June 2022 and recognises BSL as language of England, Wales and Scotland (section 1(1)), but does not apply to matters devolved to Wales such as education, health and transport
- A BSL Act is needed for Wales: this Bill will complement those pieces of legislation and help to improve the provision of BSL across Wales (Senedd Cymru, 2022) * Statement by Mark Isherwood MS: Introduction of a Member Proposed Bill – The British Sign Language (Wales) Bill was made at the Senedd yesterday (July 16th 2025)

How can we improve accessibility for deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals? Recognising that written English may not be their first language, we can use QR codes to link to BSL videos explaining letters or bills, ensuring clear instructions and reducing unnecessary waiting.

Regarding my background: I experienced meningitis at 18 months old, which resulted in ongoing balance difficulties. Growing up, some individuals mistakenly assumed I was intoxicated due to my unsteady gait; on one occasion, law enforcement officers even asked me to walk in a straight line. I explained that I was not under the influence but rather deaf and clarified that my balance issues are more pronounced in low-light conditions—a known consequence of meningitis. Additionally, English is not my first language, so I have often relied on a dictionary for effective communication.

A friend mentioned a situation at the deaf club where an interpreter was needed to help explain important information. Without the interpreter, there could be a significant risk of misunderstanding. For example, when someone receives a bill, they might assume they owe a specific amount but may not fully grasp the details and set it aside. Previously, paper bills would sometimes arrive with red markings indicating urgency, which served as a clear warning to pay promptly. As more processes move online, some individuals may not realise that payment is due since reminders might not be as prominent as before, especially for those accustomed to handling finances in person at a bank. But it's a new generation, things are changing. All about social media, which is fantastic. But we still need to remember the people who want to be independent, but they just function from an older way of processing things, and they just cringe at the very idea of the Internet because that can bring up a lot of fear for some people. So, it's thinking of different ways to support all the different members of society and maybe coming together and talking together to find a better way forward

- One final thought ...If you were to meet / be contacted by a Deaf person who uses British Sign Language (BSL) as part of your role at Dŵr Cymru, how would you ensure effective and respectful communication?

Jo Seymour, Warm Wales

I am Jo, I'm the partnership director and I'm going to talk about the value of community and partnership. I love talking, very passionate about what I do and really, we can't do anything unless we're working together. I think that's the biggest thing. We've heard lots of data, lots of information about what current situation is within the UK now and across Wales, and really the simple truth is that no single organisation can solve complex social challenges alone.

So, I'm going to go through just some of background information with regards to the cost of living and poverty. We've all seen a number of these stats, but 22% of the population of Wales live in poverty. That's 200,000 children, living in poverty, and obviously, that's what we've got to think about. We've got about thinking about what we are doing for our children going forward. 26% are from working households, and I think again, that's something to be really, mindful is that previously we may be looking at those individuals who were relying on some form of benefit. Yes, we know you're in a working household, you can get benefit. And we heard from OVO about the number of people and findings that are experiencing and how much money they have to live on. And I think it's a key thing to be very, very mindful of. And again, 90% of people receiving universal credit go without one basics, such as foods of one home, adequate clothing, or toiletries. So again, to be talking about this information, but also the reason why we have got to work together.

Impact on energy costs

- Around **6 million** households in the UK are currently in fuel poverty, which has increased by **2 million** since 2021.
- In Wales, **45% (614,000)** of households could be in fuel poverty and **15% (201,000)** of households could be at risk of falling into fuel poverty.
- Energy costs are **41%** higher than in the winter of 2021
- Current energy debt is **£4 billion**
- It is estimated that illnesses linked to cold, damp, homes cost the NHS more than **£2.5 billion** a year equating to **£6.9 million** a day, which has increased from **£3.6 million** in 2016.

When we consider the number of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing—estimated at 575,000—and those living in poverty, it becomes evident that there is significant overlap between these groups. It is important to reflect on how we can collectively support these communities and recognize the roles we each play. These challenges often affect the same individuals, a point that remains central in my current reflections.

I have a background as an environmental health practitioner and am a registered public health practitioner. My focus is on understanding the connections between impact and prevention, particularly in relation to the home environment. It is important to consider both the physical aspects of the home and access to it, as these factors influence overall well-being. According to the World Health Organisation, a dwelling refers to the physical structure, while a home encompasses the social, cultural, and economic context created by individuals or households.

Housing must play a central role in our discussions. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, access to essentials such as food, water, rest, and secure shelter is fundamental to enabling individuals to reach their full potential. These basic needs underscore the importance of collaboration and partnership in addressing these issues effectively.

Many organisations seek funding from various sources, including charities, and often encounter challenges in identifying reliable funding opportunities. This ongoing concern highlights the need for collective action. Encouraging organisations that provide funding to support collaboration rather than competition may lead to more effective outcomes and enhanced opportunities.

From a community standpoint, it is important to recognise the effort involved when individuals reach out for support. If someone chooses to disengage after making contact, it is necessary to consider potential reasons behind this decision rather than assuming disinterest. Building trust within communities and facilitating access to support are key factors in addressing these issues.

From a well-being perspective, it is important to recognise that well-being does not solely relate to the absence of ill health; rather, it reflects how individuals perceive themselves and their lives. Our collective work aims to enhance this by supporting people in building resilience.

We will officially become a charity on 1 August 2025.

Our Focus remains - Aim to provide homes with affordable warmth and to alleviate fuel poverty across the country

"to work with others to alleviate fuel poverty and to provide homes in Wales with affordable warmth. In doing so we aim to make a difference in the everyday lives of people in Wales and the Southwest by making their homes more energy efficient, healthy, comfortable, durable and affordable"

"Our mission is to empower people to make the right choices and decisions for themselves to enable them to alleviate fuel poverty and become more resilient"

Our Foundation: The four pillars of support from Warm Wales

- Health and prevention work
- Community Engagement
- Community Based Support
- Affordable Warmth and Energy Efficiency

Provide support under the four key pillars to mitigate the impact of fuel poverty by looking at improving energy efficiency, providing financial support, providing energy advice and education and investing in renewal energy solutions.

Bringing together energy advice, casework support, awareness, and behaviour change alongside social prescribing and well-being initiatives to improve health outcomes by addressing root causes. This holistic model links health, wellbeing, and early intervention to create lasting, positive impact in people's lives.

At Warm Wales, we believe that everyone deserves a warm, safe, and healthy home. From April 2024 to March 2025, we reached out to 770 residents across our communities to understand how our support has made a difference in their lives.

Out of the 770 people contacted:

- 342 residents chose to take part in our feedback survey — 44%
- 387 declined, but every voice matters, and we're grateful to those who shared their experiences.

Q&A Session

Question 1 – How have you found the different challenges across Wales? Is there a difference between urban and rural areas?

Steve – OVO – At our OVO hub in Manidee, Newport, we faced challenges because many locals spoke languages like Arabic, unlike areas such as Pill that used WhatsApp for communication. If you don't use the most effective communication method for your target area, engagement will be low. And then in some of our rural places we had to use newspaper as things like mobile signal are poor so having digital communication won't be as effective compared to the written form. It all about making sure you understand your target area and don't just turn up and expect what worked in one region to work in another. Having a flexible approach that allows for meeting the needs of that area works well.

Helen – Bipolar – As a mental health charity, we see that population density impacts support for those with bipolar disorder. In rural areas, there are too few people to sustain services, while urban areas are crowded and often lack sufficient support. Transport is another key factor with rural having limited access or transport to those high population services. Making sure that you treat each area differently will allow you to make sure you reach the right people.

Jo – Warm Wales – It is important to understand the various organisations involved and work with those who are familiar with community needs and can offer support. When expanding efforts, consider who can collaborate and how joint work may enhance overall support. Assessing the specific needs of each area is beneficial. Identifying trusted individuals within the community can help inform and shape responses to local requirements. Partnering with existing groups can help provide more comprehensive support.

Chaz – Deaf Council for Wales – Urban areas offer strong support networks for Deaf people, but in West Wales, progress is slower. Establishing deaf clubs helps meet local needs, especially since rural areas often lack such resources. Word of mouth can gradually strengthen these connections. Transport challenges make it even harder for Deaf individuals in remote locations to access the support they need.

Question 2 – Do we have the right systems in place to support a collaborative approach?

Helen – Bipolar – Ultimately, funding is the key issue. Rather than approaching this as a conflict, a collaborative strategy would be more effective. By working together, we can allocate resources appropriately and ensure that funding is directed where and when it is most needed. It is also essential that the state does not use this as an excuse to reduce spending but rather adopts a person-centred approach that truly supports individuals.

Jo – Warm Wales – Large organisations should collaborate with smaller partners to drive development. We need funding that encourages working with many rather than a select few, enabling shared resources and support to achieve change.

Steven – OVO – We got asked to put our hand in our own pocket to provide that support for our own programs, but it does come down to taking on that burden to allow others to grow and offer the support you can do and work together.

Kit Wilson – Welsh Water – We adopted a Team Wales approach, recognising the need to work collaboratively with industry and agriculture for meaningful environmental change. As we invest billions of pounds, it's essential that all parties contribute, since no single organisation can achieve these goals alone.

Feedback around the strategy – Q-A sessions Overview

Question 1

How can organisations manage the risks of data sharing agreements under GDPR, while ensuring information is shared to help individuals?

- Response: Participants acknowledged the complexity and risk in data sharing, emphasising that the primary purpose is to help, not harm, individuals. While GDPR's goal is to protect data, the dialogue highlighted the importance of supporting people and focusing on positive outcomes.

Question 2

How can we make it easy and accessible for customers to find products or services that meet their needs? For example, where is the website's language change accessibility feature?

- Response: The group discussed visibility challenges for website accessibility features, such as changing language. While tools like ReciteMe were praised, it was noted they don't serve everyone. Attention was drawn to the importance of language, imagery, and the need to ensure symbols used are genuinely meaningful to users.

Question 3

What role does funding play in improving client services, and how crucial is continued financial support from partners?

- Response: Funding was identified as vital to making significant changes and maintaining improvements. Ongoing support from partners was described as essential, enabling organisations to adapt and serve client needs—something that becomes challenging without steady funding.

Question 4

How can charities keep up with changing customer needs, given funding constraints, and are there opportunities to pilot new approaches and share best practices?

- Response: The conversation noted the evolution of addressing vulnerability in services—from a mere buzzword to a central aim supported by dedicated teams. Regular customer surveys inform changes, but limited resources present difficulties. There was enthusiasm for piloting new ideas, collaborating, and sharing insights across organisations to advance accessibility. Possible outlook to come back in a year and talk about how we have all worked together.

Question 5

How can services better support groups such as the deaf community—for example, by translating basic website information into sign language?

- Response: The suggestion to provide sign language translations for essential website content was well received, with offers of assistance in scripting and translation, and the recommendation that such resources should not be time limited. Using QR codes, Using BSL video services and driving awareness across each business.

Question 6

How do we reach and support people who are vulnerable but may not seek help, such as stroke survivors or those unfamiliar with benefits?

- Response: Real-world examples were shared. Many may not believe they're entitled to help and therefore miss out. The group discussed the importance of proactive outreach to ensure such individuals are not overlooked.



Jody Perkins/Tracey Price, Community Team at DCWW

Annie Lamb, Team Leader, Water Services at DCWW

Jo Seymour, Warm Wales

Steven Donovan, Ovo Energy

Helen Hancock, Bipolar UK

Cath Booth, Wales Council for Deaf People

Appendices



Appendix A: Agenda

- 09:30 Arrival and refreshments
- 10:00 Welcome and housekeeping, Rebecca Price, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
- 10:05 Video from Jane Hutt MS, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice
- 10:10 Kit Wilson Director for Customer and Developer Services, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
- 10:40 Steven Donovan, Ovo Energy
- 11:10 Helen Hancock, Bipolar UK
- 11:40 Break
- 11:55 Chaz Hampton, Wales Council for Deaf People
- 12:25 Joanna Seymour, Warm Wales
- 12:55 Lunch & Expo Stands
- 13:55 Feedback and Q&A Session
- 14:35 Closing remarks, Kit Wilson, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
- 14:45 Close

Appendix B: Speaker Bios

Jane Hutt MS - Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice

Jane Hutt spent part of her childhood in Uganda and Kenya, and was educated at the University of Kent, the London School of Economics and Bristol University. Jane has lived and worked in Wales since 1972.

Jane was an elected member of the former South Glamorgan County Council for 12 years and was first elected to the Assembly in 1999. Between 1999 and 2005 Jane has served as Minister for Health and Social Services in the Welsh Government. From 2005 to 2007, she was Minister for Assembly Business and Chief Whip. In the first Cabinet of the Third Assembly, she was appointed Minister for Budget and Assembly Business.

In the coalition Cabinet, announced on 19 July 2007, Jane became Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. In December 2009 she was appointed Minister for Business and Budget, subsequently Minister for Finance until 2016 when she was appointed Leader of the House and Chief Whip at the start of the Fifth Assembly.

On 13 December 2018 Jane was appointed Deputy Minister and Chief Whip. Jane was appointed Minister for Social Justice on 13 May 2021. In the 2023 Birthday Honours, Jane was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). On 21 March 2024, Jane was appointed Chief Whip and Trefnydd. Jane was appointed Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip on 11 September 2024.

Jane is an honorary fellow of Cardiff Metropolitan University and Cardiff and Vale College. She is a Welsh learner.

Steven Donovan, OVO Energy

Steve is the TCF and Consumer Vulnerability Lead at OVO Energy. He is a specialist in customer experience and strategy, with a particular focus on inclusive design and supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances. Steve lives with his family in the Newport region and enjoys all aspects of engaging with the communities in Wales.

Helen Hancock, Bipolar UK

Helen joined Bipolar UK as a peer support officer in 2022 having previously worked for many years as a company secretary and lawyer. She has also worked in the NHS in Bristol and South Wales as a community nursing and mental health services manager. Helen has experience of bipolar through friends and family.

Chaz Hampton, Wales Council for Deaf People

Chaz works with the Wales Council for Deaf People and works tirelessly as an ambassador for the deaf community. He is passionate about access to services for the community and speaks openly about the challenges the community face such as public health, utility sector, schooling and the benefits system for support.

Jo Seymour, Warm Wales – Director of Partnerships and development

Joanna's role combines project management, operational delivery, staff management, identifying and cultivating new partnerships and leading on the development of new project opportunities. Joanna joined Warm Wales as Project Manager in November 2017 and is a qualified Environmental Health Practitioner and a registered public health practitioner.

Appendix C: List of attendees

Your name	Your organisation
Abigail Nolasco-Wilson	Diverse Cymru
Angharad Burden	Marie Curie
Anthea Cornwall-Nicholas	Warm Wales
Ben Cullerton	British Deaf Association
Beth Lloyd	Citizens Advice RCT
Cath Booth	Wales Council for Deaf People
Chaz Hampton	Wales Council for Deaf People
Chrissie Sumner	Stop Loan Shark Wales
Clare Dickinson	Taff Housing
Davinia Bailey	The Salvation Army
Donna Lewis	Citizens Advice RCT
Gareth Thomas	National Energy Action

Helen Clarke	Kidney Care UK
Helen Hancock	Bipolar UK
Jack Bentley	Care and Repair Cymru
Jacqui Osborne	OVO
James Eul	Interpreter service – Welsh translation
Jayne Lewis	Newport City Council
Joanna Seymour	Warm Wales
Jon Antoniazzi	Marie Curie
Jonathan Cosson	Warm Wales
Katherine Pritchard	Newport City Council
Katie Wood	Hafren Dyfrdwy
Kayleigh Nor-Val	Citizens Advice Cardiff
Lawrence Davies	Money and Pensions Service
Louise Moir	Hafren Dyfrdwy
Lucy Price	Scope
Lydia Parry	Bron Afon
Maureen Casagrande	Neath/Port Talbot Stroke Group
Mike Freeman	Cardiff 3tf Sector Council
Mildred Foster	Women Connect First
Natalie Clark	Cardiff and Vale Credit Union
Nigel Oanea-Cram	Trussell
Olivia Exon	Scope
Owen Derbyshire	ICG
Paul Labourn	The Salvation Army
Paula Skyrme	Hedyn
Rachel Williams	Wales Council for Deaf People
Rob Sandalls	StepChange
Robyn Harris	Wales Council for Deaf People
Ryan Evans	Stop Loan Sharks Wales
Sharon Derrick	Wales Council for Deaf People
Sian McDonald	Hedyn
Steve Donovan	OVO
Tracey Stone	Welfare Together Ltd
Vicki Gurner	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Jacob Danouai	Cardiff and Vale Credit Union

Kit Wilson	Dwr Cymru
Rebecca Price	Dwr Cymru
Sarah Sebburn	Dwr Cymru
Ross Forbes	Dwr Cymru
Jon Garbutt	Dwr Cymru
Elijah Javed-Mackenzie	Dwr Cymru
Gemma Patel	Dwr Cymru

Anna Humphrey	Dwr Cymru
Sion Griffiths	Dwr Cymru
Tracey Price	Dwr Cymru
Jody Perkins	Dwr Cymru
Emily Burrows	Dwr Cymru

Appendix D: Pictures throughout the day





