

COUNTY COUNCIL – 10 FEBRUARY 2026

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1) Zofia Page - Forest Row, East Sussex

Please could East Sussex County Council explain clearly who has responsibility for what in terms of water outages, and what the Council's role is if a water company (in this case South East Water) fails to make adequate provisions in the case of water outages.

Response by Lead Member for Transport and Environment

During a water supply interruption, water companies in England and Wales have a statutory duty to ensure continued access to essential water and to support customers until normal service is restored.

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, water companies have must ensure continuation of their water distribution functions during an emergency and are required to plan to provide alternative supplies in the event of a loss of normal supply. As set out in Security and Emergency Measures Direction (SEMD) 2022, in the event of an unavoidable failure of piped supply, water companies must ensure that a minimum supply is provided by alternative means.

If the supply fails, water companies must continue providing alternative water (e.g. bottled water, bowsers) until normal supply is restored.

Water companies must prioritise vulnerable and at-risk customers by ensuring they receive appropriate alternative supplies. Local Authorities support this through sharing vulnerable people data with water companies.

Additionally, during an outage, water companies must inform those affected that the supply has been interrupted, where to get an alternative supply, and the time by when the supply will be restored.

East Sussex County Council is a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. We have duties to assess risk, maintain emergency plans, warn and inform the public and cooperate with responder organisations. Additionally, in this context the County Council has the responsibility of coordinating data relating to vulnerable people.

2) Monika Koncz-Mackenzie - Forest Row, East Sussex

We understand that the council may provide staff to help with the distribution of water and support for management of distribution lists of vulnerable people who will need water deliveries. If the council had/has to use its own resources to make up for inadequacies in the provisions of alternative water supplies made by commercial water companies, what processes are in place to seek redress and compensation from the water companies?

It is not good use of public funds if councils are in effect having to "bail out" corporations who fail in their statutory obligations.

Response by Lead Member for Transport and Environment

South East Water used their own extensive network of staff and contractors to ensure bottled water was delivered to bottled water stations and vulnerable people.

Whilst during a major incident involving water supplies, Sussex Resilience Forum (SRF) partner support can include providing staff to help manage bottled water stations or assisting with deliveries to vulnerable customers, on this occasion South East Water did not request any support to deliver bottled water to vulnerable people. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) provided a list of vulnerable people, in accordance with the Sussex Resilience Forum Vulnerable Person plan, to help ensure that all known vulnerable customers received doorstep deliveries of bottled water during the outage.

3) Ffion Thomas – Wych Cross, East Sussex

During the recent water outages it was very difficult for residents without access to cars to obtain sufficient water from the bottled water locations in East Grinstead. What steps can and are East Sussex County Council taking to ensure that South East Water makes adequate provision of water to all affected residents (including those without their own transport) should such outages occur again (this is the second time in 3 years that such outages have occurred, so it is not an uncommon occurrence)?

Response by Lead Member for Transport and Environment

It is the statutory responsibility of water providers to ensure appropriate provision of water by alternative means should the piped water supply fail.