

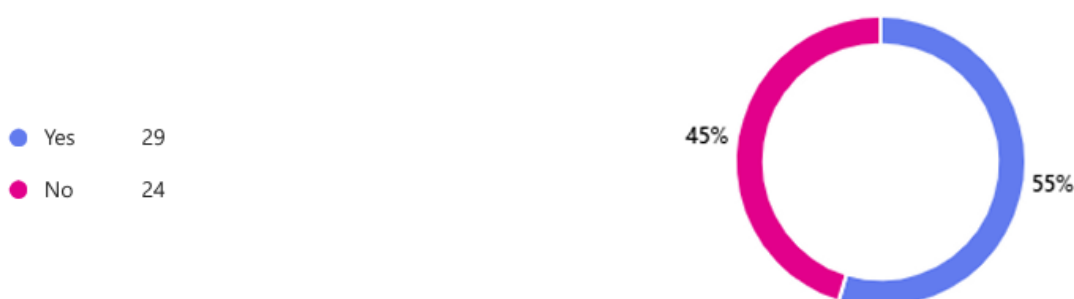
Kent County Council Short Focused Inquiry – Water Supply

Summary of Responses to Parish/Town Council Questionnaire

1. **Which Parish or Town Council are you responding on behalf of?
Please also provide your name.**

53 Parish and Town Councils responded.

2. **Was your Parish/ Town affected by a water supply failure in 2025/26?**



(End of questionnaire for those responding 'No')

3. **How was your Parish/Town affected by water supply failure in 2025/26? (length of time affected, how many times over what period)**

Summary of written responses:

Many Parish and Town Councils reported significant water supply failures throughout 2025/26, with the most severe disruption occurring in January 2026. Communities experienced complete loss of supply, prolonged low pressure, boil-water notices, and poor-quality water. Outages ranged from a few hours to several days, with some parishes affected for one to two weeks and others experiencing multiple incidents over the year, often lasting two to three days.

Essential facilities, including doctors' surgeries, schools, campsites, and local businesses, were affected, leading to closures and loss of income. Intermittent supply was common, with water returning briefly before failing again, creating uncertainty and disruption, particularly for vulnerable households.

Long-standing issues were highlighted in locations where residents have endured chronic low pressure and unreliable supply for many years. Overall, respondents described a pattern of recurrent disruption, limited resilience, and poor communication, with many councils receiving little or

no formal notice of outages, restricting their ability to support residents effectively.

4. Please rate the quality of communication you received from the water company between 1, for none at all, to 5, for very good.



5. Please rate the quality of communication you received from KCC between 1, for none at all, to 5, for very good.



6. Please offer any further comments about the communication and/or quality of advice received from the water company and/or KCC. If you were reliant on information being provided other than from the water companies or KCC please specify the source of this information.

Summary of written responses:

The majority of Parish and Town Councils reported poor, inconsistent, or non-existent communication from South East Water during water supply failures. Many councils and residents received no direct communication at all, while others only received updates if they had proactively registered for text alerts. Even where updates were received, these were often late, inaccurate, overly optimistic, or contradicted conditions on the ground. In

some cases, water company representatives initially denied there was a problem, and call handlers lacked the information needed to respond to enquiries. Statements about water quality were also questioned, with assurances that brown water was safe despite being unpalatable.

Most councils reported receiving no information about water supply failures, beyond occasional notifications from KCC Highways relating to road closures caused by burst mains. As a result, Parish and Town Councils often learned of outages through residents or social media rather than official channels. Several respondents noted that local authorities did not proactively identify affected parishes or contact Clerks to assist with local communication and coordination, leaving councils unclear about their role and responsibilities during incidents.

Consequently, communities relied heavily on parish councils, local councillors, and social media networks for information. While this worked for some residents, it disadvantaged elderly, vulnerable, and digitally excluded people. Parish Councils repeatedly stepped in to bridge communication gaps.

7. Were you, as a Parish/Town Council, actively involved in the supply of information about the water supply failure to your residents?



8. Were you, as a Parish/Town Council, actively involved in the supply of support services following the water supply failure to your residents?



9. If your answer to question 7 or 8 was yes, could you please provide more detail about the supply of information and support services you provided to your residents?

Summary of written responses:

In the absence of consistent support many Parish and Town Councils took direct action to support their residents during water supply failures. This included Parish Councillors personally purchasing bottled water from local supermarkets, organising ad-hoc deliveries, and distributing supplies locally, particularly to residents without cars or internet access. Some councils established temporary local water stations in village halls or community centres, often relying entirely on volunteers and without assistance from statutory bodies or the water company.

Parish Councils also acted as the primary source of information for residents. Updates were shared through parish websites, Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups, village noticeboards, emails, and direct phone calls. Clerks and councillors frequently liaised with South East Water, MPs, district councillors, and neighbouring parishes to obtain information that could then be passed on locally. In several cases, councils arranged lifts to distant water collection points, supported Emergency Help Teams, or worked with volunteers to maintain communications and respond to residents' queries.

Despite these efforts, councils consistently reported that they were severely constrained by poor or late information from the water company, making it difficult to provide reassurance or plan support effectively. Some councils described feeling "helpless" due to the lack of reliable updates, while others noted that elderly and vulnerable residents still missed out on supplies due to registration issues or limited communication channels.

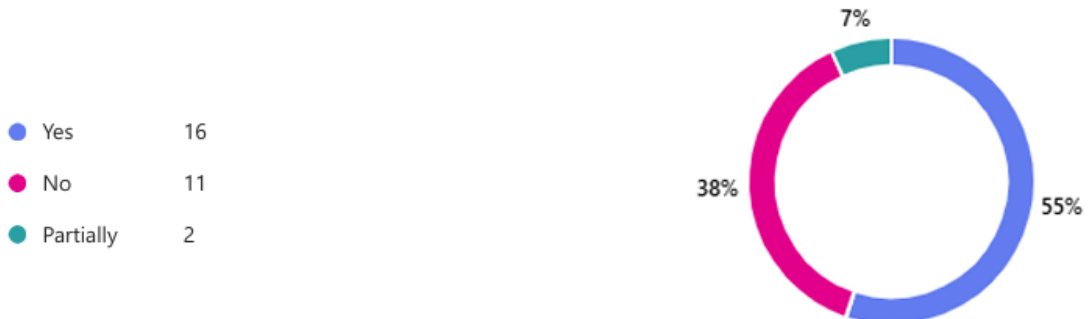
10. Were any KCC services in your Parish/ Town affected by the water supply failure? If so, please explain in more detail what the service was and how it was affected?

Summary of written responses:

Most Parish and Town Councils reported that they were not aware of any KCC services being directly affected by the water supply failures, or that no information was provided to enable them to make such an assessment. Many respondents replied with "no", "not known", or "unsure", often citing the lack of communication as the reason they could not confirm whether services were impacted. This absence of information meant that councils were largely reliant on local knowledge rather than official updates. Several councils reported that primary schools had to close due to loss of water supply, disrupting pupils, families, and staff. In addition, some parishes

experienced numerous emergency road closures on highways as a result of burst water mains, causing further local disruption.

11. Did you experience issues accessing bottled water stations in your Parish/ Town?



12. Could you please provide more detail of the issues you faced?

Summary of written responses:

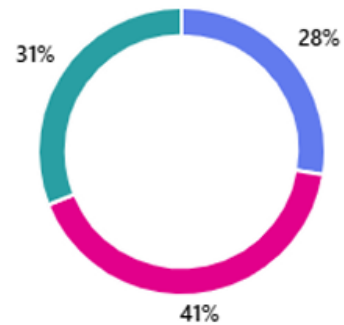
Respondents reported serious difficulties accessing emergency water supplies, with many parishes stating that no water stations were provided at all, despite requests or prior agreements. Where stations were established, they were often located far from affected communities. These locations were not accessible for elderly residents, those without transport, or people responsible for livestock, and were described as overcrowded, poorly managed, and prone to running out of supplies. In some cases, stations closed when residents still needed water or were only opened after local need had passed.

As a result, Parish Councils and volunteers were forced to intervene. Councils set up their own distribution points, organised bottled water deliveries after repeated attempts to contact the water company and used village halls to store and distribute supplies. Councillors and volunteers frequently staffed water stations themselves. In several cases, bottled water deliveries took many hours to arrive, often late in the evening, placing additional strain on local staff and volunteers.

There were also significant gaps in provision for specific groups. While household supplies were sometimes available, respondents reported little or no provision for businesses or farming livestock, and poor delivery to residents on priority or vulnerable registers. Some residents had to travel to neighbouring towns to obtain water.

13. Were you aware of the correct escalation channels (water companies, District Council, KCC etc.)?

● Yes	8
● No	12
● Partially	9



14. What are the key learning points or improvements that you would like to see if a future event occurred?

Summary of written responses:

Respondents consistently identified communication failures as the most critical issue requiring improvement. There was strong consensus that information must be faster, more accurate, and more transparent, with honesty preferred over overly optimistic statements. Parish and Town Councils stressed the need to be formally notified immediately when supply interruptions occur, with ongoing updates and realistic timescales for restoration so that councils can inform residents effectively. Communication must reach all residents, not just those on social media, ensuring elderly, vulnerable, and digitally excluded people are not overlooked.

There was also a strong call for clearer coordination, roles, and accountability during incidents. Water companies were urged to better understand the geographical impacts of failures, particularly in rural areas, and to take direct responsibility for emergency actions such as bottled water distribution, especially for those on the priority register, which was widely reported as being poorly implemented. Parish Councils requested clear escalation routes, dedicated emergency contact points, better-informed call handlers, and improved coordination between water companies, KCC, and other stakeholders.

Finally, respondents emphasised the need for better emergency planning and resilience. This includes pre-agreed, locally accessible water stations in suitable locations such as village halls, sufficient provision to reduce congestion, and clearer guidance on how councils can assist during prolonged outages. There were also calls for preventative action, including timely repair of burst mains, investigation of persistent low pressure issues, and investment to prevent recurrence.

15. Please add any further comments you believe may be relevant to this Inquiry including any lessons learned/ improvements needed.

Summary of written responses:

Respondents raised serious concerns about the long-term resilience of the water network, describing infrastructure as outdated and already under strain. Many felt that recent and planned housing growth has not been adequately matched by infrastructure investment, leading to reduced pressure, intermittent supply, and repeated outages. Examples were given where new developments benefit from upgraded mains while existing communities continue to experience poor or unreliable supply, particularly in rural areas. There was a strong view that access to clean, uncontaminated water is a basic right and that responsibility for funding and delivering infrastructure upgrades must be clearly agreed and enforced.

There was also widespread concern about the lack of clarity, transparency, and preparedness during outages. Respondents called for clear guidance on how long supply can be interrupted before bottled water is provided, what procedures trigger emergency support, and the need to plan for non-potable water requirements alongside drinking water. Repeated outages within short periods, coupled with poor communication, have undermined confidence in contingency planning and emergency management. In some cases, unfixed burst pipes and deliberate diversion of water to other areas were reported, with little or no explanation, leading to perceptions of unfair treatment of rural communities.

Compensation was described as inconsistent and unclear, with similar impacts resulting in different outcomes for residents. Persistent low-pressure issues and erratic performance of key assets, such as pumping stations, were seen as requiring urgent investigation. Parish Councils stressed the importance of developing local resilience plans, improving coordination between water companies, local authorities, and developers, and ensuring communities are notified early and accurately when issues arise. Overall, respondents expressed strong concern that without decisive action, these problems will continue to recur, particularly as further development places additional strain on the system.