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# Water Resilient Communities: Rhondda Fach Interim Report

September 2018

Contents

- 1. Introduction ..... 2
- 2. Why Rhondda Fach? ..... 2
  - 2.1 The area and its challenges..... 3
  - 2.2 Supporting the delivery of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015..... 3
  - 2.3 Adopting Ofwat’s ‘FACE’ model ..... 4
  - 2.4 What do we want the project to achieve? ..... 5
- 3. What are we doing at Rhondda Fach?..... 5
  - 3.1 Internal workstreams ..... 7
- 4. Research..... 8
- 5. Community Fund..... 9
- 6. Providing financial governance expertise to Tylorstown Welfare Hall..... 9
- 7. Showcasing best practice..... 9
  - 7.1 Parkinson’s UK ..... 10
  - 7.2 Maerdy paddling pool ..... 10
- 8. Summary of key results to date: ..... 10
- 9. Looking ahead ..... 11
- 10. Case studies ..... 12

## 1. Introduction

The benefits of working with communities is a recurrent theme of the Welsh Government's wider agenda and, for example, "A Wales of cohesive communities" is a statutory well-being goal under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Community engagement is also a priority of Ofwat's, as is clear from its "Tapped in"<sup>i</sup> and "Resilience in the Round"<sup>ii</sup> documents. To quote Ofwat, *"our ambition [is for] for customers to be seen not simply as passive recipients of water and wastewater services but as active participants with a real impact on the services they pay for."*

There are clear synergies with our customer centred approach. For example, in Welsh Water 2050<sup>iii</sup> we have identified "Working with customers and communities" amongst the strategic responses we must harness to ensure that we are equipped to respond to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Our Rhondda Fach Water Resilient Community is an exciting pilot project which seeks to explore the opportunities for converting these broad aspirations into practical action on the ground. It has challenged us to involve customers in a way we have not done before and leverages the power of our presence in one of Wales' most deprived communities, aligns our activities to address local needs and works with the local community to even greater impact.

This paper outlines the background to the project and its delivery as well as the wider benefits it will bring to the community, the environment and to ourselves.

Applying the lessons learnt, we intend to expand our Water Resilient Community programme during 2020-2025, in other communities.

## 2. Why Rhondda Fach?

Sitting alongside one of our largest investments (£23million) in the zonal studies programme during 2015-2020, the Rhondda Fach Water Resilient Pilot Project aims to maximise the benefit of our presence in one of Wales' most deprived communities – focussing key areas of our work on a comparatively small geographic area with the intention of leaving the legacy of a "water resilient community."

Our work in the Maerdy Porth zone is our single largest investment as part of our zonal studies programme during 2015-2020: 54km of new water mains are being laid between Maerdy and Pontypridd. This £23 million investment will address customer acceptability issues linked to the appearance, taste, odour of local drinking water supplies, as well as improving its reliability.

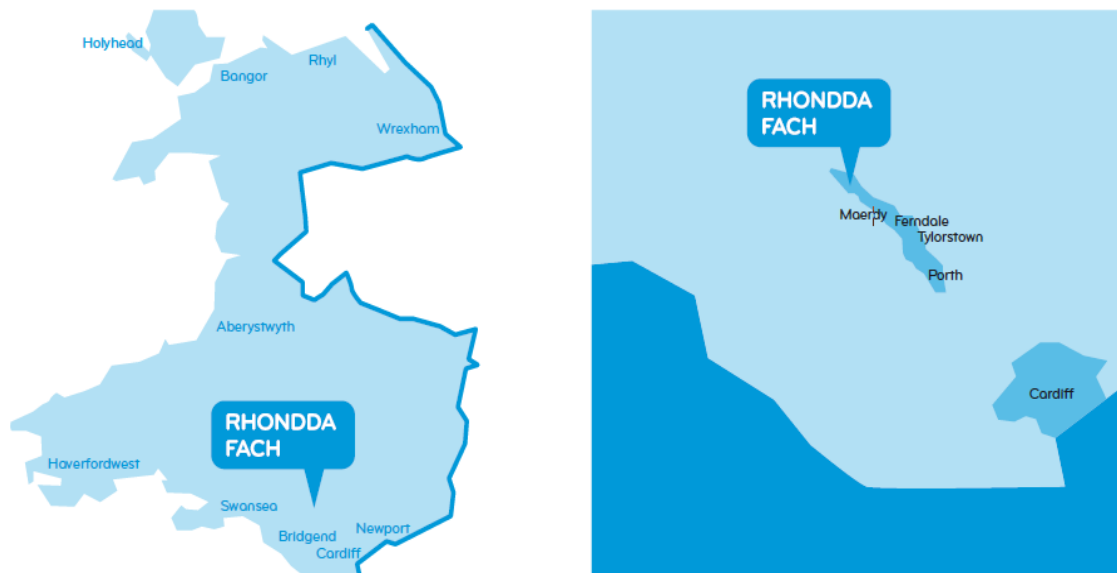
Working within a narrow valley, with one main road passing through it, the scheme has an array of design challenges to minimise disruption to the local community. Although we have laid mains through steep mountainsides and along old railway tracks, some of the work has inevitably taken place in the highway, including Porth town centre, residential streets and stretches of main road.

Engagement with the local community is essential whilst we are completing work to explain what we are doing and manage customer expectations. However, this project has pushed us further by identifying areas where we can maximise the benefit we can bring to an area whilst investing in

our own assets, as well as involving, working with and listening to the community to make these changes for long-term benefits.

## 2.1 The area and its challenges

The Rhondda Fach is situated in the South Wales valleys (pictured below). We have 9,748 household accounts in the area and serve around 21,000 people.



To gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by the local community, we commissioned a socio-economic overview by Dr Mark Lang of Cardiff University. It concluded that the area was amongst the most deprived in Wales in terms of income, health, employment, education and community safety. Child poverty rates are amongst the highest in Wales, with some parts having rates more than twice the Wales average or more. Some areas have high rates of economic inactivity and long-term unemployment. Life expectancy is lower than the Wales average.

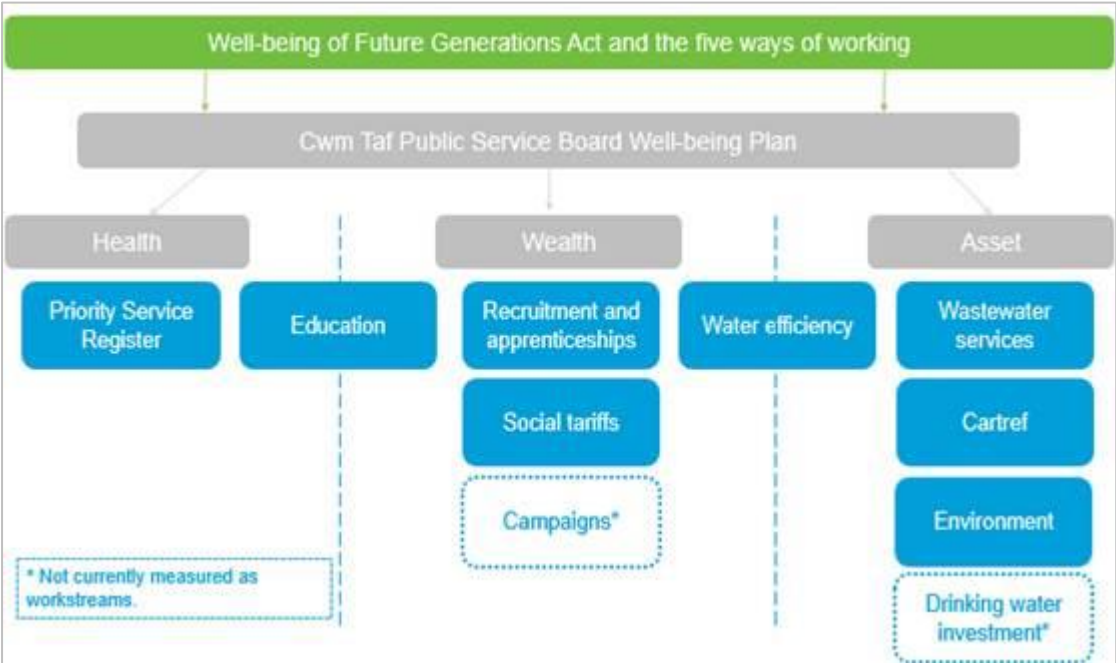
Despite the socio-economic challenges faced by much of the local community, only a comparatively small number were registered under our social tariff schemes.

## 2.2 Supporting the delivery of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

It was agreed at our first stakeholder workshop where we launched our Rhondda Fach pilot that we should try to align with the objectives of the well-being assessment<sup>iv</sup> produced for the wider area by Cwm Taf Public Services Board under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The well-being assessment identified three key objectives:

1. To promote safe, strong, and thriving communities improving the well-being of residents and visitors and building on our community assets.
2. To help people live long and healthy lives and overcome any challenges.
3. To grow a resilient local economy with infrastructure that attracts people to live, work and play in Cwm Taf.

The Well-being’s plan initiatives can be summarised into health, wealth and asset. The diagram below outlines how we aligned our key focuses against each objective.



2.3 Adopting Ofwat’s ‘FACE’ model

Ofwat’s “Tapped In” report emphasised the importance of adopting a customer culture, highlighting principles of moving them “*from passive customer to active participant*” through the use of the FACE model. Our Water Resilient Community programme embodies that approach:

- F FUTURES:** customer participation to improve the current and future sustainability of water in the lives of customers.
- A ACTION:** customer behaviour change actions, including saving water and helping to reduce sewer blockages.
- C COMMUNITY:** community ownership of particular aspects of water as an essential resource.
- E EXPERIENCE:** increasing customer control of water in their home or of the customer service experience.

**Futures** – working with customers in the local community through our extensive education programme (reaching our future customers) and community engagement, both with the

resilience project and as part of our capital investment scheme, to raise awareness of the role customers have to play in ensuring future sustainability of water in their community.

**Action** - once the proactive inspections on our sewerage network have taken place we will be working with customers on a behaviour change campaign linked to our 'Let's Stop the Block' campaign.

**Community** – we have been offering customers living in the Rhondda Fach a free, water efficiency audit in their home. This gives customers a better understanding of how much water appliances in their home use. The free products installed during the visit can help customers reduce the amount of water they are using in their home.

**Experience** – we have been working with local customers and groups to help shape our messaging and marketing materials to make sure our messages are relevant and in a language that is easy for local customers to understand.

## 2.4 What do we want the project to achieve?

The Rhondda Fach Water Resilient Community pilot project seeks to harness the knowledge and creativity of customers living in the area to maximise the positive impact we have in the area. We are also hoping for a number of tangible business outcomes, such as by:

- influencing customer behaviour through our “Let’s Stop the Block!” and water efficiency campaigns; and
- working with customers to understand the barriers they may face that prevent them from accessing one of our social tariffs, or registering for the Priority Service Register (PSR).

The ultimate aim of the pilot has been to co-produce and co-deliver our plans in the Rhondda Fach to create a water resilient community and to leave a positive legacy once our physical presence in the area reduces.

## 3. What are we doing at Rhondda Fach?

Involving key, local stakeholders from the beginning of the project helped shaped our objectives and set the tone of the project. We were able to emphasise that we wanted to work with the community rather than just tell them what we are doing.

An initial challenge was identifying the key stakeholders: ensuring that we had the right people involved from the beginning was crucial to the success of the project. Cynnal Cymru ('Sustain Wales')<sup>v</sup> was therefore commissioned to help identify and connect with local stakeholders.

We held a series of workshops with the stakeholders to share our ideas and to gain feedback. Stakeholders in the scoping of the project included:

- Interlink RCT (the County Voluntary Council for Rhondda Cynon Taf)

- Trivallis (the main housing association for the area)
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT CBC)
- Office of the Commissioner for Future Generations
- Cwm Taf Public Service Board (Cwm Taf PSB)
- Cwm Taf University Health Board
- Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

Seven themes (listed below) emerged from the discussion, bringing to life the information that was presented in the socio-economic report for the area:

- Communication and community spirit
- Health and well-being
- Business
- Mobility and transport
- Education and employment
- Environment
- Income

During the initial session we received suggestions on the local groups and organisations we should involve in helping to shape an action plan so that we could begin building relationships in the area. We've had positive feedback from stakeholders on this approach.

It became clear early in the project that although the area has a relatively small number of households, with five dominant areas (Maerdy, Ferndale, Tylorstown, Ynyshir and Porth), each community has a strong identity and a strong sense of community. Therefore it was crucial to make links in all of the individual communities to make sure our messaging has reach throughout the valley.

As the project progressed we realised that we needed to bring together our external stakeholders and a wider range of internal colleagues. We held our first joint workshop in May 2018. A key learning from this pilot is that we should bring internal and external stakeholders together much sooner. For our colleagues, it brings to life some of the challenges that customers face: real-life examples are much more powerful than the reports and statistics usually used. For external stakeholders, it gives them the opportunity to meet the wider project team, challenge them and also offer further support to the project.

We have used a number of outreach and collaborative approaches including:

- Utilising existing networks to gain feedback and become trusted partners to share our messages with customers. This has included collaborating with larger organisations, such as Trivallis, enabling us to harness their teams across the area who work with around 10% of the population in the Rhondda Fach through their housing surgeries, blitz days (a day when Trivallis' tenants in a community are invited to speak to their local housing manager as well as partner organisations such as the local authority, fire service, police etc.) and other information events. An example of the customer benefits is described in [case study 1](#) at the end of this paper.



- Working with the local social prescriber (a health professional who can refer people to local, non-clinical services) and health and well-being coordinators to advise customers about our priority services register, social tariffs and water efficiency. We have also collaborated with the Jobcentre Plus in Porth, enabling us to reach customers who are receiving benefits and who may be eligible for support through our social tariffs.
- Co-development of local marketing materials, see [case study 2](#) at the end of this paper.
- Inviting local customers to discussions as well as visiting local community venues to talk to customers, raise awareness of the services we are offering in the area and gain feedback throughout. An example of the customer benefits is found in [case study 3](#) at the end of this paper.
- Collaborating with the Welsh Government's 'Valley's Task Force'. We have shared our learning, ensuring our work is complimentary rather than a duplication of efforts, and avoiding mixed messaging being given to the community.
- Taking part in the Facebook Live event where customers had the opportunity to attend in person or watch on Facebook to get updates on the work in the area including the investment in the drinking water network and the additional work we are doing to build resilience in their community. Customers had the opportunity to ask questions via Facebook comments, 1,900 customers tuned in during the event and the video has since had over 4,000 views.
- Working with future generations of customers by giving free lessons to all schools in the area, providing information and raising awareness of the investment in their local drinking water network, as well as the importance of water efficiency and how they can be more water efficient at home. During the second education visit to the school we had colleagues outside the school at the end of the day to speak to parents about the work taking place in the area, provide information and support to reduce their bills and also raise awareness of our water efficiency audits.



### 3.1 Internal work streams

The project has focused on eight key work streams that support the ongoing work in the area and the Cwm Taf Well-being objectives. The work streams are services that are generally available to customers across our supply area. However, by targeting our efforts in the area and working with local customers to tailor how we promote and deliver these services, we have begun to achieve better results. This is illustrated by the uptake of the Community Fund in the area as well as the increase in social tariff uptake when compared to the figures for our whole operating area.



Work stream	Objectives	Impact
<b>Affordability</b>	Increase the number of customers on a social tariff.	An additional 278 customers have been signed up to HelpU, a customer saving of some £67,000.
<b>Education</b>	Offer all schools in the Rhondda Fach a free, outreach service including a school assembly and lessons as well as offering schools free water efficiency audits.	2,309 pupils and staff have been involved with one of our outreach sessions.  Nine schools have booked us in for a second visit that will focus on water efficiency.  Five schools have received a water efficiency audit.
<b>Water efficiency</b>	Raise awareness of water efficiency and offer up to 1,500 free, home audits including installation of water saving products.	As this work stream is in the early stages of delivery, data is still being collated on the impact the water audits have had on customers.
<b>Recruitment</b>	Increase awareness and interest in career opportunities with us, in particular our apprenticeship scheme.	Six young people have completed the 'Get into Construction' programme with the Prince's Trust and two of our contract partners.  19 applications received for our apprenticeship programme.
<b>Wastewater</b>	Reduce the number of blockages.	As this work stream has only just started, it is too early to report on any potential impact.
<b>Cartref</b>	Identify high usage and leaks on customer pipes with a view to repair, free of charge.	As this work stream has only just started, it is too early to report on any potential impact.
<b>Environment</b>	To identify environmental opportunities we can support and identifying opportunities to promote biodiversity funding.	As this work stream has only just started, it is too early to assess any potential impact.

#### 4. Research

Two formal pieces of customer research have included samples from the Rhondda Fach area. This included options testing research to help us understand customer preferences for investment in our PR19 business plan. We have also conducted vulnerable customer research which has been used to help us define and understand their needs: this will provide the evidence base for our Vulnerable Customer Strategy. Both of these pieces conducted focus groups in Tylorstown welfare hall recruiting customers from the local area.

## 5. Community Fund

Our Community Fund was launched towards the end of 2017 and offers small grants of up to £1,000 to non-profit groups and organisations across our supply area, with those who have work taking place by us in their local area being given higher preference. Groups are able to apply for one-off costs for projects, equipment etc. that will bring benefit to their local community.

The Rhondda Fach Water Resilient Community project has enabled us to raise awareness of the Fund to local groups. We have worked closely with Interlink RCT who work closely with community groups and offer training on bid writing. They have promoted the Community Fund through these networks who we have seen a significant number of applicants to the Fund coming from the area: despite having fewer than 10,000 households, the Rhondda Fach has received over 30% of the funding from the Community Fund.

	Number of groups	Amount awarded
<b>Rhondda Fach</b>	28	£10,100.00
<b>Our supply area</b>	102	£32,015.00
<b>Rhondda Fach as % of total</b>	27.45%	31.55%

## 6. Providing financial governance expertise to Tylorstown Welfare Hall

Interlink RCT came to us for support for Tylorstown Welfare Hall which had been awarded Big Lottery Funding to improve the services available. They wanted a trustee to volunteer an evening a month who had experience of financial governance and large sums of money. Peter Bridgewater, our Financial and Commercial Director, has agreed to fulfil this role.

## 7. Showcasing best practice

We were approached by the Good Practice team at the Wales Audit Office to showcase the Rhondda Fach Water Resilient Community project as good practice in customer engagement in the context of resilience. We have been asked to present at their two conferences in October 2018 with a mix of public and private sector organisations invited.

### 7.1 Parkinson's UK

Through a focus group held for the PR19 business plan, a customer identified herself as living with Parkinson's and highlighted the voluntary work she does with Parkinson's UK, including providing awareness sessions for Western Power Distribution and Welsh Government. We have since worked with her to raise awareness of what it is like living with Parkinson's, some of the signs and symptoms to look out for and to explore how we can tailor our customer service to enhance the experience that such customers receive. We are working with Parkinson's UK and colleagues in our Retail team to understand how we can embed this work as part of the Vulnerable Customer Strategy.



### 7.2 Maerdy paddling pool

We filled Maerdy paddling pool without charging the local group. We also supported Trivallis at the community launch event by providing free water bottles and educational activities on the day. We used the event to raise awareness of the support available to customers, such as the water efficiency audits, social tariffs and priority services register. Maerdy's paddling pool will provide a great resource to local families and may also attract others to visit the area, potentially benefitting local shops.

## 8. Summary of key results to date:

- Customers have saved over £67,000 by successfully applying for HelpU - there has been a significant increase in take-up compared to other areas over the same period;
- Over 2,000 children have attended our outreach lessons on water efficiency, capital projects, or STEM;
- Over 100 customers and stakeholders have contributed to over 50 workshops, meetings and focus groups;
- Over £10,000 has been allocated to 28 community projects from our Community Fund;
- Every school has been offered a water efficiency audit on their premises to reduce water consumption and costs;
- Pilots have started to provide free water efficiency audits and checks for leakage in customers' properties to reduce water consumption and costs (Project Cartref);
- Six young people achieved placements on the Prince's Trust "Get into construction" programme;
- 19 applications have been received from the area to become an apprentice;

- An innovative Facebook Live “event” was held in the Pop Factory Porth to engage with customers online and explain the work we’re doing in the area and what we’re trying to achieve. Over 4,500 have viewed the event; and
- Peter Bridgwater (Finance and Commercial Director, Welsh Water) has become a Trustee of Tylorstown Welfare Hall.

The success of the project to date has been due to the wide range of collaboration both internally across the business as well as with our customers and local stakeholders. Interlink RCT, one of the organisations we’re working with commented: *“The way Welsh Water has engaged with the Rhondda communities is unique and should inspire other companies to do the same. The relationships that have been developed will continue long after the project has finished which will have a huge impact on these communities that are made up of some of the poorest people in Wales.”*

### 9. Looking ahead

The Rhondda Fach pilot is running for twelve months (January-December 2018). It is our intention to roll-out this approach to one community per year throughout AMP7.

Locations for future projects are still to be confirmed. Communities will be identified by analysing data from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, our social tariff uptake and cross-referencing it against our major investment schemes. Possible locations include Anglesey; Rhyl; Pembroke Dock; Townhill, Swansea; Hereford City; Maesteg; Saltney Chester; Towyn Gwynedd; and Llanelli.

10. Case studies

**Case study 1 – partnership working for customer outcomes** – We attended the Trivallis housing surgery in Penrhys along with the local housing manager for the estate. This is a ‘drop-in’ service where tenants can talk to their local housing manager and raise any concerns they have.

We met a customer who had not paid her water bill for over 18 years. She was nervous about speaking to Welsh Water but knew she had a large outstanding bill. The local housing manager explained that we could offer support to reduce her current bill whilst working towards eliminating her outstanding debt. Trivallis had recently helped the customer improve some of her other finances, such as paying her TV licence. The endorsement from Trivallis meant that the customer spoke to us and agreed for a tariff to be applied to her account and to apply to our Customer Assistance Fund – a scheme to help customers clear their debt.

The customer explained her sense of relief knowing that she could get back on track with her finances. She confirmed that she was unlikely to have spoken to us outside of the housing surgery: it was Trivallis’ endorsement that reassured her that we would try our best to support her.

**Case study 2 – community co-development** - The project team worked with 32 customers in Ferndale, Penrhys and Tylorstown to improve our leaflet promoting free water efficiency audits in local homes.

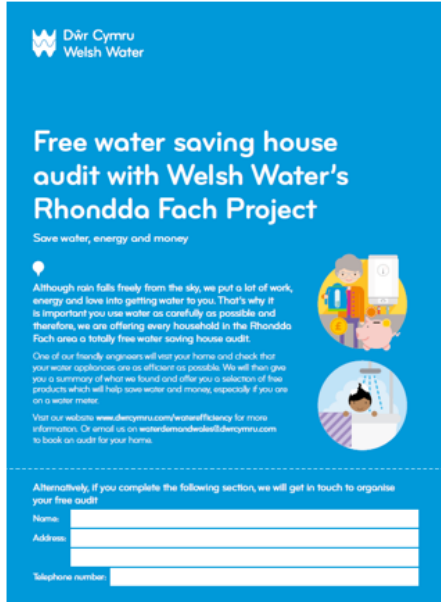
Customers found our original leaflet confusing. For example they didn’t know what ‘water saving house audit’ meant. After we explained its purpose and potential benefits, customers felt that the selling point was that customers could save money. It was agreed that this would be the headline message

Customers advised that to grab people’s attention we should not refer to “Rhondda Fach” but should, instead, use the local town name such as Ferndale or Penrhys as people felt a stronger connection to the town where they live. It was also suggested that using landmarks specific to the valley would strengthen the local messaging.

Customers also helped redesign the lay-out of the text to make it easier for customers to understand and quickly locate the information they were interested in, such as ‘what will happen’.

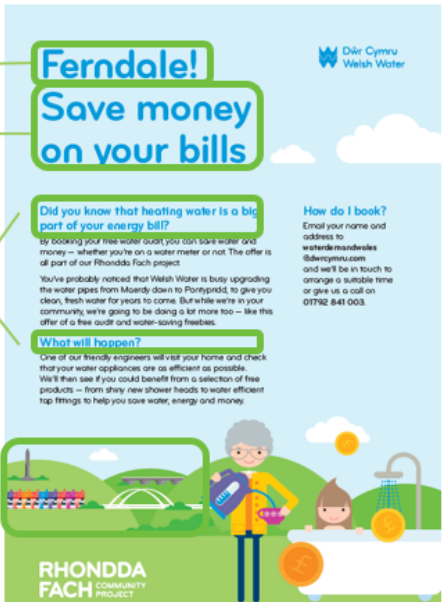
A before and after of the leaflets are shown below.

**Original**



The original leaflet has a blue background. It features the Welsh Water logo at the top left. The main title is 'Free water saving house audit with Welsh Water's Rhondda Fach Project'. Below this is a sub-header 'Save water, energy and money'. The body text explains the project and offers a free audit. At the bottom, there is a form for customers to request an audit, with fields for Name, Address, and Telephone number.

**Co-created with customers**



The co-created leaflet has a light blue background. It features the Welsh Water logo at the top right. The main headline is 'Ferndale! Save money on your bills'. Below this is a section titled 'Did you know that heating water is a big part of your energy bill?' which explains the benefits of a free audit. To the right of this section is a 'How do I book?' section with contact information. At the bottom, there is a section titled 'What will happen?' which describes the audit process. The leaflet also includes a local landmark illustration of a bridge and a person holding a water bottle.

**Hyper-local messaging**

**Simple message**

**Clearer explanation**

**Local landmarks**

**Case study 3 – collaboration** - At one of our customer involvement events, we became aware of growing concerns over the number of rats on the Penrhys estate. Customers worried about the risks to their children, especially as the local Environmental Health Department had been called to the local primary school a few times during the year. Customers had raised their concerns with several organisations but the situation didn't seem to be improving.

The customer who brought this to our attention told us about an upcoming meeting with the Penrhys Partnership (a charity run by local people to support those living in Penrhys), Trivallis and RCT CBC to look at how to best tackle the situation. Ahead of the meeting, colleagues in our wastewater services surveyed the Penrhys sewerage network: they found that a large part of the estate was demolished over 12 years ago and the 'abandoned' part of the network had not been capped off, so could be used by rats to access the 'active' part of the network.

Since then, two meetings have been held to agree a plan of action with members of the community, through the Penrhys Partnership, Trivallis, RCT CBC and ourselves. It has been agreed that we will work in partnership to resolve the issue as quickly as possible to improve the living conditions on the estate. Agreed roles:

- Welsh Water – surveyed the network and has reduced costs of the work on the sewerage network from £35,500 to £5,500 by working with partners to find the most cost effective solution and arranged a community information event in Penrhys.
- Trivallis – agreed to pay for the work on the sewerage network and will utilise their communication channels to communicate with their tenants (Trivallis own the majority of the properties on the estate).
- RCT CBC – agreed to investigate and cost the baiting options once the work on the network has been completed. They will also support the event by providing customers with information on recycling and providing food recycling caddies, which may also support with the reduction of rats.
- Penrhys Partnership – will link to the community and will promote the event through their social media pages and word of mouth.

The work is still ongoing and it is too early to report on the outcome. However, this example highlights the benefits of partnership working which enabled an action plan to be developed, agreed and

<sup>i</sup> [https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1941\\_OFWAT\\_Cust\\_Participation\\_Report\\_final.pdf](https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1941_OFWAT_Cust_Participation_Report_final.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/publication/resilience-in-the-round/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.dwrcymru.com/en/Company-Information/Business-Planning/Welsh-Water-2050.aspx>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.ourcwmtaf.wales/cwm-taf-well-being>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.cynnalcymru.com/>