WE HAVE held the first meetings of our new stakeholder panels.

They bring together local authorities, environmental groups, trade bodies and regulators to help shape how we deliver our services now and in the future.

The roundtable discussions will also act as sounding boards for new ideas and provide expertise, insight and challenge on the feasibility of our plans, policies and assumptions.

Our Hampshire and Isle of Wight panel was attended by, among others, Hampshire County Council, the Wessex Chalk Stream Trust and the New Forest National Park Authority.

Our Kent panel included the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the South East Rivers Trust and Kent County Council.

Sussex Wildlife Trust, the Arun and Rother Rivers Trust and the two county councils were among the guests at the Sussex panel.

At our Strategic Environment Panel in June we spoke to national stakeholders including the WWF-UK, the Environment Agency, Natural England, RSPB, National Farmers’ Union and the Green Alliance.

We operate in an environmentally-sensitive, water-stressed area, so water resources, resilience and catchment-working were high on the agenda.

County panel members discussed and suggested new ways to secure reliable supplies of drinking water to help inform our Water Resources Management Plan.

Suggestions ranged from rainwater capture and catchment management to financial rewards, seasonal tariffs, water-efficient housing design and promoting agricultural water storage.

If you have any more ideas please take a few minutes to fill in our online questionnaire southernwater.co.uk/planning-for-the-future by 9 September.

Branwen Rhead, from our Policy and Stakeholder Engagement team said: “The panels bring together a wide range of interests and expertise from across our region. This is important to ensure that our plans meet the needs of current and future customers.”

Minutes and outcomes from all the panels will be available through the stakeholder page on our website.

MEMBERS of the Consumer Council for Water visited our Peacehaven wastewater treatment works near Brighton for a tour.

Our Chief Executive Matthew Wright showed the members of the London and South East Regional Committee around the site and held a Q&A session with them over lunch.

Hot topics included our customer service performance, how we plan for population growth and how the industry will look in five years.

Matthew explained that we have made fundamental changes to our customer services and reduced complaints by 30 per cent compared with last year.

He also stressed the importance of integration and collaboration between water companies to meet the challenges of climate change and population growth.

Regarding the future, Matthew explained that the likely introduction of household competition would be a big challenge for the water industry to get right for customers.

Sir Tony Redmond, regional chair of the committee said the “first-class” site was “a credit to Southern Water” and that the members were “amazed at how seamlessly it blends into the landscape”.

Matthew said: “I was pleased to show Consumer Council for Water members around Peacehaven. “It remains our biggest ever capital project and demonstrates perfectly how much we’re investing to deliver higher standards for customers and the environment.”

Feedback on the sessions has been extremely positive. Cllr Keith Evans from Fareham Borough Council said the panel was “very informative” and gave an “excellent background” to our activities. Catherine Patel from the Environment Agency said that it was “great to have the opportunity to link in all our work issues”. Sue Armstrong Brown from the Green Alliance said: “I’m delighted that Southern Water is taking this approach and opening up strategic discussions on the environment.”

Taking action on behalf of our most vulnerable customers

CUSTOMERS receiving pension credits now automatically qualify for our social tariff, Essentials.

We have changed the eligibility criteria for Essentials and are proactively calling customers on pension credits to let them know.

Customers may also be eligible if their water charges represent three per cent or more of their household income.

Over the past year alone, more than 12,000 customers have signed up to the tariff and are making savings of between 20-90 per cent on their bills.

If you know someone who may benefit from this change, please ask them to call us on 0800 027 0363.

For more information see southernwater.co.uk/difficulty-paying-your-bill.
**Help us plan for the future**

WE ARE busy planning for the future and want your views to help us. Our Business Plan and long-term strategy is reviewed every five years as part of the Ofwat Periodic Review.

The next one, in 2019, will set our customers’ bills for 2020-25.

Our current plan was based on feedback from more than 27,000 customers and local stakeholders. This gave us a clear understanding of their priorities and helped shape the plan which is used to inform everyday decision-making and investment.

As part of the next Business Plan review, we want to understand if these priorities have changed.

We want to know if our performance measures and targets still reflect your needs. Although day-to-day interaction with our customers provides a good understanding of where our performance is good and where we need to improve, we will be supplementing this with more targeted research.

The first phase of this aims to review the measures we use, confirm priorities and update our long-term targets.

Our stakeholders need to be part of this review and our stakeholder panels will help guide and challenge our plans and decision-making.

We would also welcome your views to help ensure we secure input from a broad range of interests across our area.

The diagram below shows customer priorities for improvement over 2015-20.

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**Future water supply challenges discussed**

THE impact of abstraction reform on water supplies for both agriculture and the water industry was top of the agenda at a high profile meeting.

Our CEO, Matthew Wright, met President of the National Farmers’ Union (NFU), Meurig Raymond and Acting Chair of the Environment Agency, Emma Boyd-Howard and visited local salad growers, L J Betts in West Malling, Kent.

They were joined by specialists from the NFU, government officials, local farmers and our Water Strategy Manager, Meyrick Gough.

The visit was set up to discuss the challenges facing the agricultural sector in the south-east, in particular the availability of water to meet future growth. It also explored how the proposed reforms to the abstraction regime could support easier trading between water companies and other abstractors.

Matthew and Meyrick spoke about the work we are doing in partnership with Kent County Council, South East Water and Defra, to look at the opportunities to support local growers through water trading.

Our plans for a water re-use scheme in the area will provide an additional 20 million litres of water per day, some of which we can trade with others to support their water needs.

At a national level we are working to develop an overarching framework for water resources.

This involves collaborating with other water companies and key stakeholders including Ofwat and Defra, to develop a strategy and framework to plan for future water resource needs across England and Wales.

Meyrick said: “The meeting was really encouraging and gave us the opportunity to discuss some of the key areas where we need to do more to work together to secure water supplies for public consumption and agricultural use.”

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**Exiting the non-household retail market**

FROM 1 April 2017, retail services for all non-household water customers will be open to competition.

This means all businesses, public sector organisations and charities will be able to switch their retail services provider.

The change will not affect household customers.

We currently provide both retail and wholesale services to about 105,000 non-household customers across our region.

In April 2017, when the competitive market is expected to open, we intend to exit the non-household customer retail market.

To do this, all our non-household customers will transfer to Business Stream, which will be responsible for all aspects of the retail service.

Business Stream is a specialist retailer which has been at the forefront of the competitive market in Scotland since it opened in 2008.

Our Chief Executive Matthew Wright said: “We believe this sale is the best solution for our non-household customers as Business Stream’s track record of delivering savings and value-added services to customers gave us confidence in transferring our non-household customers to their care.”

We will remain the provider of all wholesale services to non-household customers, including the treatment and supply of water and the removal of wastewater.

We have established a new wholesale services team to provide excellent operational support to all the non-household retailers who will be serving customers in our region.

For more information, visit southernwater.co.uk/countdown

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**Metering judged a bold move**

OUR metering programme was named runner-up at the Guardian Sustainable Business Awards.

The accolade was granted in the ‘bold move’ category which recognises companies that have taken a groundbreaking step to advance sustainability and pave the way for other businesses.

Ben Earl, our water efficiency manager, said the award was “fantastic” and “a real tribute to the whole team”.

We were the only water company shortlisted at the awards, joining companies as diverse as The Carbon Trust, Innocent Smoothies, B&Q and IKEA.

We were the first water company to complete a large-scale metering programme.

Since the programme started in 2010, we have installed more than 400,000 water meters across the south-east to help manage demand of this precious resource.

Our customers are now using, on average, 16.5 per cent less water than they were before the programme started.

But our water-saving efforts don’t stop there – we are working hard to reduce water use by a further 10 per cent by 2020.

To do this, we are working with schools, small businesses and our customers to help them save water, energy and money.
War on FOG comes to Hampshire

OUR Network Protection Officers are visiting homes and businesses across Hampshire on a fat-busting mission.

The team is warning customers of the problems caused by pouring fats, oils and grease (FOG) down sinks and putting ‘unflushables’ like wet wipes and sanitary products down toilets.

Each year there are around 23,000 blockages across our network of almost 40,000km of sewers – about two thirds of these are caused by FOG and unflushables.

At worst, blockages can lead to wastewater backing up and flooding into people’s homes and gardens.

The visits are part of a £1.4 million programme to reduce blockages by working in 2,000 blockage ‘hotspots’ across the south-east.

The programme includes lifting manholes to look for blockages, CCTV inspections of sewers and talking to customers to explain how to safely dispose of FOG and unflushables – in the bin.

Tim Bagnall, our waste services manager, said: “Sewer flooding can be a really upsetting experience for our customers, so we want to raise awareness of what they should and shouldn’t be putting down our sinks and toilets, in order to keep drains and sewers flowing clear.

“Our sewer pipes are much smaller than many people think – only about 10cm in diameter – so the only things we can safely flush down them are the three Ps – pee, poo and paper.”

Gurdwara invites Southern Water to help community ‘keep it clear’

WE VISITED a Sikh temple to speak to customers about our Keep It Clear campaign to keep the sewers running freely.

A team from our FOG and unflushables programme spoke to 150 members of the Gurdwara Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib in Southampton.

The area, which is home to several takeaway restaurants, is a hotspot for sewer blockages caused by cooking oil poured down sinks and items like wet wipes flushed down toilets.

The event was the first of its kind to be held in the Southampton area.

Sharon Holdstock, Field Customer Engagement Officer, said: “We’re immensely grateful to the Gurdwara for leading the way and inviting us along to their community day.

“There are ‘hotspots’ all over the Southampton area, and events like this will help us spread important information about keeping our drains and sewers running clear. I hope that many other community and business groups will invite us along to speak to all their members and visitors.”

Mr Balbir Singh Kasba, Stage Secretary at the Gurdwara, said: “As Sikhs, we believe that everyone should take responsibility for looking after our environment.

“We are delighted to work with Southern Water to help people learn about how we can best help to protect our drains and sewers, and cut down on the terrible side effects that mistreating them can bring, such as flooding and pollution.”
A MEMORIAL gardens has become the unlikely home of a flood alleviation scheme.

A huge 21-metre deep tank has been installed underneath the Royal George Memorial Gardens on Ryde Esplanade on the Isle of Wight.

The tank protects homes in the area from flooding during heavy rain as the local sewers carry both wastewater and rainwater.

Now, up to one million litres of water can be stored until the rain subsides – reducing the risk of the pipes being overwhelmed and causing flooding.

Following completion of the project, the memorial gardens have been re-landscaped and re-dedicated.

Mayor of Winchester Jane Rutter was in the audience for a performance at Kings Worthy Primary School, Winchester.

She said: “This was a fun way to really engage with young people about the importance of saving water. I’m sure the children have already shared the tips with everyone back at home.”

The Drips has been designed to meet National Curriculum requirements and is part of our educational programme which includes resource packs and free fitting of water-saving devices.

The Island’s MP Andrew Turner, High Sheriff Robin Courage MBE and Cllr Henry Adams, the Mayor of Ryde were among the dignitaries who attended the re-dedication ceremony.

Cllr Adams said: “I think Southern Water has done a brilliant job restoring the gardens following the flood work. “We were worried when we first heard of the plans but the gardens have been reinstated to their former glory and even better.”

Peter Simmons, our project manager, said: “We’re delighted to support the dedication of the Royal George memorial gardens following their renovation.

“We have worked closely with the local community to improve the gardens for the people of Ryde and visitors to the Island.”