

Ofwat & CCW | Customer experiences of sewage flooding events/incidents

Discussion guide for interviews | FINAL | 27.01.2022

Objectives

- To explore the range of experiences faced by customers when they experience a sewage flooding event/incident, and the impact that these events have on them practically, financially and emotionally.
- To map the context of an incident, such as number of properties affected, cause, who was resident, and whether they were vulnerable – and whether company responses differ accordingly.
- To understand the customer journey in responding to sewage flooding event/incident, including who they contacted (their water company vs others e.g., insurance) and why, the responses they received and their level of satisfaction with the service.
- To determine what good and bad practice looks like in water company's responses to sewage flooding events/incidents and the extent to which customer expectations were met during their experiences.
- To understand what 'resolution' means for customers and identify any initial thoughts on how water companies could improve the service they offer.

The purpose of this document is to serve as a guide to inform the flow of the discussions, rather than a definitive list of questions to cover. As these are qualitative sessions, the moderator will use the guide flexibly and be guided by what comes out of the discussions.

Moderator instructions are *italicised*

Questions in **bold** should always be asked (whilst others should be optional to help guide the conversation)

Section and aim	Key questions and probes	Time	Total
<p>Introductions and housekeeping</p>	<p>My name is [XXX] and I'm a researcher from an independent research agency called BritainThinks.</p> <p>We are conducting research on behalf of Ofwat, the Water Services Regulation Authority and The Consumer Council for Water (CCW), to understand your experience of sewage flooding event/incident. Ofwat is the regulator for water services in England and Wales – overseeing water company performance to protect the interests of consumers, society and the environment. CCW is the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales. They help consumers resolve complaints against their water company and use research to champion the interests of consumers.</p> <p>Throughout this research, we'll be talking a lot about your water company. Please note, for most people, the company that provides freshwater services (the water that comes out of your taps) is the same company that provides wastewater services (when you flush the loo, for example). But for a minority of customers, a separate company provides wastewater services. We are asking about wastewater services, so we're interested in the company that provides this.</p> <p><i>Explain terms of the session:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We'll be talking for 60 minutes – finishing up at [XXX]. If I move you along at any point, this is just to ensure that we cover everything we need to within this timeframe. ● There are no right or wrong answers – we are just interested in hearing your thoughts and experiences. ● You can opt out of the research at any time, and you don't have to answer all of the questions asked. ● Incentives will be paid by bank transfer after the session/via a donation to your preferred charity. <p><i>Confirm confidentiality:</i></p>	<p>5</p>	<p>5</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We abide by the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. We will also never pass your contact details on to any third party and will not include your name within our research reports. ● The only exception to this is if you say something that gives me reason to think you or someone else is at risk of harm. In the unlikely event that this happens, we may be legally obliged to pass this information on to the relevant authorities. ● With your permission we would like to record this session. In the first instance, this is just so that the immediate team at BritainThinks can refer back to the interview for analysis purposes. ● However, with your permission, we would also like the option to share the footage in the form of short edited clips with the clients commissioning the research (Ofwat and CCW) as part of our final research report. The footage could be shared by our client in communications, social media and on the website in relation to this research. If you consent to this, you have the right to opt out or change your mind at any given time, and your interview footage will not be shared. You also have the option of asking us to send the footage to you after the research for your further approval for usage. Should you decline, only the immediate team at BritainThinks will have access to the footage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Obtain necessary permissions to record/share footage.</i> ● <i>Offer the opportunity to ask questions about the research process.</i> <p>To kick things off, it would be great if we could do some introductions. Please could you tell me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Your first name ● If you work what is your job role and area of work ● Where did you live at the time of the flooding event/incident? ● Your living situation (at the time of the flooding event/incident) – the type of home you live in and who you live with. <i>If not mentioned spontaneously, moderator to gently probe on any vulnerabilities mentioned within the screener e.g., health conditions, disabilities, living with young children</i> ● The name of your water company (at the time of the flooding event/incident) 		
--	--	--	--

<p>Recap of event/incident and level of impact</p>	<p>I'd like to start by getting an overview of the event/incident you experienced. <i>Where relevant, moderator to refer to any images/documentation provided by participant for the pre-task.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When did this take place? <i>For those who have experienced multiple events, also determine total number and level of frequency of events</i> • Can you briefly give us the 'story of the event/incident' i.e. explain what happened in your own words. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you know, can you tell us what caused the event/incident? <i>Moderator probe to understand if customer knows whether it was caused by blockage in customer's own pipe vs something else</i> • On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being 'not at all serious' and 10 being 'extremely serious', how would you describe the event/incident? <i>For those who have experienced multiple events, ask them to focus primarily on the most recent but to reflect on other events where relevant</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can you tell me why you gave it this mark? ○ What areas of your home were affected? <i>i.e. kitchen, living room vs garden or garage, driveway/ path</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>If garden or drive: Was it by the house/did you have to walk through it or could you go around it?</i> ○ How much sewage / water was there? <i>i.e. was it a pond or a puddle</i> ○ Were other areas beyond your home (other properties, outside areas) impacted as well? • Thinking in terms of damage to your home or belongings first of all, what was the impact of the event/incident on you? Your home? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent was your property or personal belongings damaged? <i>Moderator probe on costs incurred as well as damage to priceless or sentimental items, and if the property was rented, whether items were their own or their landlords</i> • Next, we'd like to hear more about the emotional impact this event/incident had on you and those you live with (if anybody). 	<p>15</p>	<p>20</p>
--	--	-----------	-----------

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How did you feel <u>during</u> the event? <i>Moderator to probe on immediate response and emotions during any clean up or fixing attempts</i> ○ What, if any, has been the lasting impact on you and/or how you feel about your home? <i>Moderator probe on whether their home feels 'clean' and 'safe' to them, whether participants are considering moving home or would like to if had the choice and if relevant, any specific impacts relating to their vulnerabilities</i> ○ If others live in the property, how have they been impacted? <i>Moderator probe on any specific impacts on young children vs older relatives</i> 		
<p>Customer journey of event/incident and response from water company</p>	<p>I'd now like to go into more detail about the event/incident, going over the timeline of events and the actions you took in response. <i>Where relevant, moderator to refer to any images/documentation provided by participant for the pre-task.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I'd first like to understand your initial reaction/actions taken upon discovering the event/incident. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Firstly, to what extent was this a surprise for you? <i>Moderator probe to understand any previous awareness of risk</i> ○ Do you remember what you first did? ○ To what extent, if at all, did you initially try to manage the problem yourself? <i>If in a rented property, moderator to probe on role of landlord</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you/your landlord have to spend any of your own/their money in doing this? ○ To what extent did you know what to do in this situation? <i>Moderator probe to understand level of participant confidence in responding to issue, and if more than one property was affected, whether they liaised with neighbours on what to do</i> ○ How easy or difficult was it for you to manage the situation? <i>Moderator probe on impact of vulnerabilities and role of landlord</i> ● We'd now like to understand which companies or organisations you were in contact with or who helped you during this time. 	<p>20</p>	<p>40</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ First of all, please can you tell us which companies you were in touch with? <i>E.g., water company, insurance, Ofwat, CCW. Moderator use response to get a sense of how many different companies the interview should cover</i> ○ And which company would you say you were in touch with the most, or who helped you the most during this time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>If water company go to questions in blue</i> ▪ <i>If another company go to questions in yellow</i> <p>FOR THOSE WHOSE MAIN POINT OF CONTACT WAS THEIR WATER COMPANY: <i>Work through these questions first before moving to later questions on contact with other companies/individuals. For others, go through questions on contact with other companies/individuals first before coming back to these questions.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thinking about your initial contact with your water company in regard to this event/incident, please tell us what this looked like. <i>Moderator note: if initial contact was brief/not that significant, move through questions quite quickly.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>If in a rented property: Was it you or your landlord that made contact? If landlord, ask participants to explain what they know about how that contact went</i> ○ <i>When did you first contact them? i.e. on the day of the incident or at a later date</i> ○ <i>Were they the first company you contacted?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>For those who their water company was their first point of contact: Why was this? Moderator probe to understand if this was based on concrete knowledge of how their water company responds to these types of events/incidents, or for those who have experienced multiple events, if it was based on prior experiences.</i> ▪ <i>For those who their water company was not their first point of contact: Why was this? Moderator probe on past experiences and expectations of water companies</i> ○ <i>How did you contact them (phone, email, social media)? Why did you choose this mode of contact?</i> 	
--	---	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How quick was their response? <i>Moderator probe on waiting time for phone contact, responsiveness in other forms of contact</i> ○ What initial action, if any, did the water company take? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How quickly did they do this? <i>Moderator probe to understand how quickly water company arrived at property</i> ▪ What was the impact of this action? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did this resolve/manage the event/incident? • To what extent were you personally satisfied with this action? ● Following on from your initial contact, please describe any further contact you had with your water company and their actions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>If in a rented property: Was it you or your landlord that was the main contact throughout this time period? If landlord, ask participants to explain what they know about how that contact went and any impacts on them having the landlord as the 'middle man' throughout this time period</i> ○ Roughly speaking, over what period of time did you continue to have contact with your water company? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How did you communicate with the water company in these interactions? <i>Email, phone, social media</i> ▪ How often were you in contact? ▪ Who initiated this contact? Did the company provide updates or did you have to reach out to them? ▪ Once you had logged the issue with the water company, was it easy to make further contact? i.e. were they able to store your details or did you have to repeat the situation each time? ▪ How easy or difficult was it for you to manage the ongoing contact? <i>Moderator probe on impact of vulnerabilities and impact of landlord involvement</i> ○ During this time, what if any further actions did they take? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How satisfied were you with these further actions? ▪ Were the actions taken requested by you, or proactively offered by the company? 		
--	--	--	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe the level of customer service delivered to you by your water company across your various points of contact? <i>Moderator probe to understand level of knowledge/expertise, urgency and empathy delivered by customer service agent/the water company</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What did they do well? ▪ What did they do less well? ▪ What was the impact of their service on you personally? <i>Moderator probe on positive and negative impacts, and impacts relating to vulnerabilities</i> • Thinking of all contact you have had with your water company, to what extent has your water company been able to provide you with some kind of resolution to the event/incident? <i>Moderator probe to understand the extent to which participant sees event/incident as being 'resolved' vs whether it is still outstanding</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Across this whole period, please tell us all of the different actions they took, if any <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What actions did they take to <u>respond</u> to the incident? ▪ What actions did they take to <u>prevent</u> further incidents? ○ What, if any, compensation was offered? <i>For those that have experienced multiple events, probe on comparison between</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you/your landlord initially have to bear any financial costs upfront which were then paid back, or were you/your landlord offered compensation outright? ○ To what extent were you satisfied with these actions/the compensation? Why? <i>Moderator probe to understand gaps between expectations and reality</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>For those that were satisfied with the response: How easy was it to get the response you wanted? Moderator probe on impact of vulnerabilities and impact of landlord involvement</i> ▪ <i>For those where other properties were also impacted: How did the response you were given compare to others?</i> 		
--	---	--	--

FOR THOSE WHOSE MAIN POINT OF CONTACT WAS SOMEBODY OTHER THAN THEIR WATER COMPANY: Work through these questions first before referring back to water company questions.

- *If in a rented property:* Was it you or your landlord that was the main contact throughout this time period? *If landlord, ask participants to explain what they know about how that contact went and any impacts on them having the landlord as the 'middle man' throughout this time period*
- When did you first contact them? *i.e. on the day of the incident or at a later date*
- Were they the first company you contacted?
 - **If no, who was and why?**
 - **If yes, why was this company/individual your first point of contact?**
- **How often were you in contact with them?** *Moderator probe to understand what this contact looked like*
- **What actions did they take, if any, to assist you?**
 - *For those who have had multiple events:* How did their response compare across the different occasions?
 - *For those where other properties were also impacted:* How did the response you were given compare to others?
 - **Was any compensation offered?** *If yes probe on what compensation and what that looked like e.g., reimbursing for money already spent by individual/their landlord*
- **How would you describe the level of customer service delivered to you by the company across your various points of contact?** *Moderator probe to understand level of knowledge/expertise, urgency and empathy delivered by customer service agent/the company*
 - *Moderator probe to understand expectations of company response vs reality*
 - What did they do well?
 - What did they do less well?
 - What was the impact of their service on you personally? *Moderator probe on positive and negative impacts, and impacts relating to vulnerabilities*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To what extent did their response match with what you were told by your water company? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What ways, if at all, did their response match or compliment what your water company told you? ○ What, ways, if at all, did their response contradict what your water company told you? ○ What ways, if at all, did their response reflect good or bad practises in terms of customer service? <p><i>Moderator to then refer back to water company questions above and work through them, or repeat above questions for other companies if relevant (although less time should be spent on companies who were not main point of contact).</i></p> <p><i>If Ofwat/CCW are mentioned as companies that have been contacted ask:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What prompted you to contact Ofwat/CCW? <i>Moderator probe on dissatisfaction with water company and sense of 'last resort'</i> ● What were your expectations of what Ofwat/CCW would do? <i>Moderator probe to understand expected actions of Ofwat/CCW vs water company</i> <p><i>Then repeat above questions on actions taken and level of service.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If you were to experience another event/incident such as this one, what would you do differently next time, if anything? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>For those that have experienced multiple events:</i> To what extent and in what ways has the service given to you from your water company been different between events? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What, if any, changes have you seen? <i>Moderator probe on positives vs negatives</i> ▪ What has caused these changes? <i>Moderator probe on participant understanding of what actions to take vs any company process improvements</i> ● Now you have experienced one (or more) event/incident like this, what advice would you give the company/other customers who are going through this? <i>Moderator probe on prevention, additional comms from company etc</i> 		
--	--	--	--

<p>Water companies responses' to event/incident, and improvements for the future</p>	<p>I'd now like to talk in more detail about the service you received from your water company, and how it could be improved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the pre-task we gave you we asked you to think of three words to describe the service you received from your water company. What three words did you come up with? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Please explain why you chose these words. • Before making contact with your water company, what were your expectations of them in this situation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent did they meet or fail to meet these expectations? • What level of responsibility do you think water companies should have in responding to an event/incident such as this one? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What level of responsibility do you think they should have in terms of managing the immediate issue? Why? ○ What level of responsibility do you think they should have in terms of managing the damage / compensating for damage? Why? <i>Moderator probe on what compensation should be offered by them vs other companies (insurance)</i> ○ How does level of responsibility vary by the different causes of flooding e.g., heavy rainfall? <i>Moderator to probe on whether 'heavy rainfall' is something that should be considered beyond water company's control or if more should be done to respond to this given the climate crisis</i> ○ Who else has a responsibility in relation to this type of event/incident? <i>Moderator probe on insurance companies</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are they responsible for? Why? • Reflecting on your experience with your water company overall, please tell us: 	<p>15</p>	<p>55</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What you think they did well? <i>Moderator probe on ‘bigger’ things such as key company approaches/level of support, compensation offered, prevention vs ‘smaller’ things such as individual customer service agents</i> ○ What you think they did less well? <i>As above, moderator probe on bigger and smaller things</i> ○ How you now feel about them as a company? ● How could water companies improve the services that they offer to customers who experience this type of event/incident? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What approach and support should they have in place? ○ How could they improve their communication? ○ What else would you like to see water companies offer to customers in this situation? ○ What more could they do to prevent this happening again to you or others? ● What are your expectations from your water company in terms of preventing future events/incidents like this one? ● What should water companies understand about customers in this situation? <i>Moderator probe to understand how they might be feeling and what they need from their water company</i> 		
Wrap-up and close	<p>To sum up, please tell me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the one piece of advice you would give to Ofwat and CCW to help water companies improve the services given to customers who have suffered an event/incident like this one? <p><i>Moderator thank, confirm incentives and next steps, then close</i></p>	5	60