

**Customer Licence Condition
Research
Discussion Guide (Focus groups)**

Fieldwork Details

- 10 x focus groups in total
- These will be conducted via Discuss.io lasting approx. 90 mins
- Each interview will be moderated by an experienced moderator within the project team

Overall Project Objectives

The objectives of the research are to understand:

- Customer expectations of water/wastewater companies in relation to customer service and support
- Views on what principles the new licence condition should include
- Views on the accompanying guidance and how this should work
- How customers want water/wastewater companies to work with people in vulnerable circumstances

<p>1. Introduction, warm up and views</p>	<p>5 mins 5.00- 5.05</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thank you so much for your time and taking part in this research. My name is xx and I work for Walnut, an independent research agency. ▪ You all have taken part in the online community and now we're bringing you together at the end of the research to talk about your experiences and views. Thank you so much for your contributions to the online community, you were all fantastic! ▪ We're going to be talking for the next 90 minutes and I'll do everything possible to make sure we finish on time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers – we are keen to understand your true views and experiences. ○ We will be recording the session today for our notes and analysis. As mentioned in your consent form, clips of the video may be used in reporting, including in a published report. ○ Please keep your cameras on if possible so it feels like more of a group chat ○ Let others have their say ○ Feel free to use the chat to add any further comments ○ Any questions? ▪ Introduce anyone else on the call (client, note taker) who will stay with camera and microphone off 	

<p>To start with we're just going to go around the group for some introductions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What's your name? ▪ Where are you from? ▪ Can you tell us something you found interesting from the online community? <p>Some of you here may have responsibility for paying your water bill others may not (shared housing) – that's fine. We want to make sure that if you do have responsibility later in life that your voice is heard now.</p>	
<p>2. Putting things right (GO THROUGH BRIEFLY)</p>	<p>5 mins 5.05- 5.10</p>
<p>Thank you.</p> <p>Now hopefully you remember we talked to you about the customer service agreement between a water company and Ofwat.</p> <p>There are three parts to the agreement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Putting things right when they go wrong - Diverse customers needs - Well informed <p>I want to go into a bit more detail about the three areas.</p> <p>We're going to start with the how water companies <i>put things right when they go wrong.</i></p> <p>STIM E</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is this a fair summary of your thoughts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there anything significant missing from this? Anything you disagree with? ▪ What scale or type of incident would it take for you to expect a dedicated hotline? E.g. probe on number of people affected, length of time to resolve, whether it's something you would report to the company (e.g. sewage in house), or something the company would tell you about (e.g. no water in households) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you think you would need it, if the information was provided by text/email/website? ▪ As far as you know, does your water company have your mobile number or email address? ▪ In the online community many people talked about issues being fixed as soon as possible. What does this mean to you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does it vary depending on the scale of the event? ▪ What do you think about these examples? How quickly would you expect your water company to react, and to fix the problem? (STIM F) 	

<p>3. Meeting customers' diverse needs (GO THROUGH BRIEFLY)</p>	<p>5 mins 5.10-5.15</p>
<p>Now I want to move on to the second result: <i>meeting customers' diverse needs</i>. Take the same structure – present the overall result and actions, and then look at the actions in turn.</p> <p>STIM I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is this a fair summary of your thoughts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there anything significant missing from this? Anything you disagree with? ○ What would 'being proactive' look like for you? What would water companies do to be proactive? 	
<p>4. Customers are well informed (GO THROUGH BRIEFLY)</p>	<p>5 mins 5.15-5.20</p>
<p>Now I want to move on to the last one: <i>customers are well informed</i>.</p> <p>STIM L</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is this a fair summary of your thoughts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there anything significant missing from this? Anything you disagree with? 	
<p>5. Introduction to guidance</p>	<p>10 mins 5.20-5.30</p>
<p>Thanks for that. Now we want to come on to talking about the guidance.</p> <p>As you read in the online community, the Results and Actions will be accompanied by some Guidance developed by Ofwat and CCW to help water companies ensure they are making the actions and results happen.</p> <p>This guidance is not supposed to tell water companies exactly what to do – it's intended to help water companies make sure they are doing the right things by showing them how they could achieve the results – but they would be free to achieve them in other ways if they wanted to.</p> <p>In the online community on the last day we started talking about how specific the guidance should be. There are different options for this. It could be quite broad, so that water companies can deliver in the way they feel is best to achieve the results. Or it could be very specific, so there's more detail on what they need to do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you think are the advantages of making the guidance quite broad and general, rather than very specific? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If not mentioned probe on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows water companies to develop and deliver services to fit their specific customers ▪ Allows them to innovate ▪ Gives them flexibility when facing unique circumstances 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Means they don't have to do things which might not work for their customers ▪ Future-proofs the guidance to ensure it doesn't quickly become out of date ▪ What are the benefits of having quite specific guidance, which gives more detail on what water companies have to do? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If not mentioned probe on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standard / minimum levels of service across the country – everyone get the same standard but companies can go beyond ▪ Less open to interpretation, so clearer for water companies what they need to do ▪ Makes it easier to know when they are meeting the results and actions, because they are following the specific guidance ▪ Makes it easier for customers to know the service their company is meant to provide ▪ Which of these arguments do you find the most convincing? Thinking about what we've been talking about how specific do you think the guidance should be? 	
<p>6. Examples of guidance</p>	<p>45 mins 5.30-6.15 10 mins each</p>
<p>We're going to show you some examples of what the guidance could look like for some of the different actions. Just to be clear, this is not finished or complete, so it's not the case that what we show you would be the final guidance.</p> <p>And it's worth remembering that the guidance is predominately for water companies to use, it's not something that customers would need to read or know about unless they were interested.</p> <p>What we'd like to know from you is whether you think this is the right type of thing, if any of these examples are the types of things that you'd expect to see, and would give you confidence that your water company had the right information to provide great customer service.</p> <p>First, we'll look at the <u>broad guidance</u>.</p> <p>MODERATOR SHOW BROAD GUIDANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are your thoughts about this guidance? ▪ If your water company did this, would it meet the Results and Actions that we've discussed? ▪ Is there enough detail here for you to be confident in the type of service you would get from your water company? ▪ Does this look like good customer service to you? 	

- **How confident would you be that water companies would be able to achieve this?**
- Is there anything **missing or unnecessary**?
- What would you **prioritise**? What's most important?

SPECIFIC PROMPTS

1A (putting things right)

- What difference would it make if the guidance specified 'as quickly as they can'? Are there just too many types of things that could happen to make this practical?
- Should the third point be included, or is it more important that water companies fix the problem and don't spend their resources on communicating about it?

2A (putting things right)

- Do they really need to evaluate each incident, when each one is going to be slightly different? If not, does it really belong in the guidance?

3A (diverse needs)

- Do water companies really need to treat different people in different ways, or should they provide the same service to everyone?

4A (diverse needs)

- What do you understand by 'range of options' and 'appropriate and affordable'?

5A (well informed)

- What does 'quickly and efficiently' mean to you?

6A (well informed)

- Is 'reflect the range of preferences' too broad? How far should water companies have to go to meet people's preferences, if they have phone, email and text as options?

Now the more specific version, which builds on the broad version.

MODERATOR SHOW MORE **DETAILED GUIDANCE**

- What are your **thoughts about this guidance**?
- If your water company did this, would it meet the Results and Actions that we've discussed?
- How confident would you be that water companies would be able to achieve this?
- **Does this look like good customer service?**
- Is there anything missing or unnecessary? **Or that might seem out of date in a few years time?**
- What would you prioritise? What's **most important**?
- **What are the pros or cons between the two types of guidance?**

SPECIFIC PROMPTS

1B (putting things right)

- On point 3, should they *always* contact customers when works are complete? Are there any exceptions? And if so, should it be in the guidance? Or more clearly defined?
- Should vulnerable customers receive 'extra support' – or just the same great service as everyone else? If so, should that be more defined in the guidance? Or would that make it hard for them to be flexible?

2B (putting things right)

- Would you really read a report if they published one after each incident? Or would this just be unnecessary admin for the water company?
- What does 'taking responsibility' mean to you? What would they need to do to acknowledge this? Does it need a clearer definition?

3B (diverse needs)

- What does 'make the most of day-to-day interactions' mean – should they ask you every time they get in touch if you're vulnerable?
- How can Ofwat measure if water companies are treating people with empathy and respect? If it's not measurable, should it be in the guidance?
- Should they really work with (and potentially exchange details with) other organisations such as CA? Would you be okay with them doing this to you?

4B (diverse needs)

- Should water companies really have responsibility to identify people who may be struggling, or is it the responsibility of the customer to ask for help? If the latter, then should this be in the guidance?
- Should they really work with (and potentially exchange details with) other organisations such as CA? Would you be okay with them doing this to you?

5B (well informed)

- What do you think about face-to-face visits? Is this really worth including the guidance? Or is it a vital part of the service to ensure vulnerable people are looked after?

6B (well informed)

- Are there other channels that should be included? What about an app?
- Do things like 'reasonable waiting time' or 'major incident' need to be defined better?

AFTER ALL

- Having seen these examples of the Guidance, have you changed your view at all on whether it should be more broad or more specific? In what way?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall what is your preference for the Guidance now in terms of how specific it should be? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why is that? What impact do you think that will have for a) water companies b) customers? 	
7. Enforcement action	10 mins 6.15 – 6.25
<p>Finally, I want to talk about how Ofwat can make sure that water companies are following the customer service agreement and doing what they need to do.</p> <p>The aim of the customer service agreement, including the Results, Actions and Guidance, is to allow Ofwat to see how water companies are performing overall, not to judge them on individual cases necessarily.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, if one customer didn't receive an email about a planned interruption to the service, this would not represent a breach of the licence condition. It would need to be something that was systemic, that affected a lot of people or repeated breaches. <p>I'd like to know from you what you'd expect it would take for Ofwat to consider action against the water company, which could include them telling the water company to make changes or imposing a fine.</p> <p>MODERATOR NOTE/READ OUT / ADAPT AS APPROPRIATE: Ofwat might do a range of things. It could talk to the water company and tell them the need to improve generally, or order them to make specific changes, or require them to pay compensation to customers, or even issue a fine to the company.</p> <p>Would you expect Ofwat to take action in these circumstances? MODERATOR, PICK A FEW EXAMPLES AS PER TIME AVAILABLE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One customer has sewage in their home for three months due to a fault caused by the water company 2. Heavy rainfall causes sewage flooding in 300 homes 3. There is an unplanned incident meaning 1,000 customers don't have water for 24 hours. During this time, 10 disabled customers are not able to access alternative water supplies 4. A water company fails to update contact details for customers for one year. Because of this, during an incident it can't contact 2,000 customers by email or text (but it does post information on its website and social media) 5. A water company fails to take annual meter readings, meaning that 10,000 customers in one region receive a bill that is £100 higher than expected. Why would you think that Ofwat should /shouldn't consider action in these situations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What action would you expect them to take? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How does the number of homes impacted influence your thoughts? ○ How does the severity, or lack of, the issue impact your thoughts? ○ Can you say what the threshold for action would be for you? 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What about whether this was a one-off incident or happened multiple times? <p>Now we've talked about Ofwat taking action against companies when there are serious or repeated breaches of their responsibilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Does this make any difference to the way you feel about the Guidance, or the customer service agreement elements as a whole (including the Results and Actions)? <p>MODERATOR READ OUT: To reassure you, Ofwat does take enforcement action against companies when needed, and uses various ways to regulate their performance and the service they provide.</p>	
<p>8. Wrap up</p>	<p>5 mins (90 mins) 8.25 – 8.30</p>
<p>We're coming to the end of the discussion, but before we go, is there anything else that you'd like to mention about any of what we've talked about today?</p> <p>Thank participants for their time and make sure incentive and relevant consent forms have been completed.</p>	

▪ **PUTTING THINGS RIGHT:**

- *Water companies making sure that they fixed problems quickly when they happened*
- *Making sure that customers weren't inconvenienced during repairs – e.g. providing alternative water sources if needed*
- *Providing great communication throughout, including regular, realistic updates on progress and when the work would be finished*
- *Reviewing incidents and how they respond to them, taking into account customers' views, so that they can prevent future incidents and deal with ones that occur more efficiently in the future*

DIVERSE NEEDS:

- *Most people thought it was right that water companies should take into account the different needs of their diverse customers*
- *These differences should include disabled people, elderly people/pensioners, parents of young children (including single parents), and people on low incomes*
- *Water companies should make sure that vulnerable customers were looked after as a priority during incidents, for example by making sure they were able to get access to alternative water supplies if the service was interrupted*
- *There should be payment plans for people who were struggling or falling behind with their bills*

WELL INFORMED

- Water companies should contact customers in the ways that they want to be contacted, and this may vary between different types of information
- They should keep customers informed about billing, incidents, and maintenance work going on in the local area
- Some people wanted to hear more information, such as what water companies are doing to upgrade their infrastructure or protect the environment.
- It should be easy for customers to contact water companies when they need to, without excessive waiting
- It should be simple to carry out routine business such as changing your address or querying a bill