

Qualitative fieldwork guide – Focus Groups

Moderator note re tailoring: Please familiarise yourself with the specific circumstances of the participants beforehand and tailor questions/probe as appropriate throughout the session. Specific issues may include but are not limited to:

- Financially vulnerable – impact of on finances e.g. buying bottled water, constraints due to financial situation e.g. can't access/afford transport to retrieve water
- Vulnerable – impact on vulnerability e.g. require water for health issue, constraints due to vulnerability e.g. cannot physically retrieve water, impact on caring for people with vulnerabilities
- Children at home – impact of childcare/work e.g. need to take time off to look after kids, increased impact on household e.g. disruption to those taking exams

Group Discussion Guide

Introduction (10 minutes)

(0 - 10 mins)

Moderator introduction – 5 minutes:

- **Purpose of session:** Thanks for joining. You're all customers of South East Water who experienced some problems with their water supply in mid-June. Ofwat and CCW have asked us to explore the experiences of customers who are affected by this kind of incident so that they can understand how customers feel about what has happened during an incident and how they would like their water company to act in that kind of situation.
- **Introduction to Blue Marble:** Independent market research agency who run research on behalf of organisations, not part of Ofwat or CCW or South East Water.
- **Data protection:** This conversation will be audio/video recorded – as covered during recruitment, Ofwat and CCW may view/listen to this recording, but it won't be shared beyond the research and policy teams. *(If necessary: We also have a representative for Ofwat/CCW here today – they won't be taking part in the discussion and just want to hear experiences from the horse's mouth, so please feel free to be open and honest.)* Your name won't appear in any reporting and won't be shared with any of the companies or more widely. Any opinions and comments will be anonymised during reporting.
- **Encouragement:** Want to understand their experiences and views – completely impartial so can be candid and not worry about causing offence. No right or wrong answers. Feel free to chip in and add to conversation, don't have to wait to be asked. Feel free to disagree – all viewpoints are interesting, but be respectful of people's views and allow each other to talk without interrupting.

Group introductions – 5 minutes:

Let's get to know each other a bit better.

- To get started, let's all take a turn to say our name, where we're joining from, who else lives at home, if anyone, and something about what you like to do in your free time.

Context on the incident (25 minutes)

(10 – 35 mins)

Objective: Build a picture of events from participants' perspective

Moderator to listen out for mentions of vulnerability in household/being on PSR, probe as appropriate in following questions, and flag responses from these people in notes so that we can determine any differences in expectations or support received.

Now that we know a bit more about each other it's time to turn our attention to the main focus of the research - as you know, we're here to talk about the problems with your water supply that you experienced in mid-June.

We will cover your experience in some detail, but first of all, let's talk about what exactly the problem was with your water supply.

Moderator note: Use responses to pre-task to direct the conversation in this section – looking to draw people in and have conversations as a group about similarities and differences in experiences, rather than individual monologues. E.g. "Sally, I can see that you had low water pressure, did anyone else experience this..."

- Tell me about your experience of the issues with your water supply. *Allow spontaneous response, prompting with the below questions as necessary to provide fleshed out narrative.*
- What problem did you have?
 - Was it just one type of problem, or more?
 - *Prompt if necessary – no water, low water pressure, intermittent water issues, discoloured water etc*
- How long did the problem last for?
 - As far as you can remember, when did the issue start and end?
 - How did the issue change during that period, if at all?
- How did the problem with your water supply affect your household?
 - How were your day-to-day activities affected by the incident?
 - What changes did you need to make to adjust to the situation? *Probe:*
 - *Eating and drinking*
 - *Personal hygiene and toileting*
 - *Cleaning and laundry*
 - *Work*
 - *Childcare/caring responsibilities (if applicable)*
 - *Leisure activities and pets*
- How easy or hard did you find it to carry on with day to day life?
 - *Show of hands – where 0 is very easy and 10 is very hard, how easy or hard did you find it to carry on with day to day life?*
- What else, if anything, was happening at the time which made it easier or harder to manage during the incident?
 - *Were there any events happening locally? Prompt if necessary – weather, traffic issues, strikes etc?*
 - *How about personally? E.g. health flare up, school closed etc*
- Have you ever experienced anything like this before?

- How did this incident compare with your previous experience? Why? *Nb. Listen out for mentions of the 'freeze thaw' incident in December 2022*

A lot of the discussion today is going to be about how South East Water supported its customers during this incident in June. Before we kick off, I'd like to check if anyone here is from a household which is on the Priority Services Register. This is a scheme which provides enhanced services to those who might need a bit of extra support, such as braille bills, or increased warning ahead of planned works.

- As far as you are aware, is anyone here from a household which is on the Priority Services Register? You don't have to say for what reason if you don't want to.
 - Was your household registered for priority services before you experienced the problems to your water supply in mid-June?
 - If not, when did you register? What prompted you to register? *Moderator note – trying to ascertain whether people were added to register as result of incident*

SHOW STIMULUS: PSR qualification

Physical disability	Blind or partial sight loss	Difficulty hearing or speaking	Health condition requiring constant supply of water e.g. Dialysis	Memory loss e.g. Dementia, Alzheimer's	Language other than English / literacy difficulties
Mental health condition e.g. depression	Older people	Unable to use internet (digitally excluded)	Developmental conditions e.g. Autism	Ill health	Children aged under 5 in household

On the screen there is a list of reasons why somebody might ask to be included in the PSR – this list isn't exhaustive though and there may be other similar reasons.

- Is there anyone here who thinks their household may qualify for priority services but aren't currently registered? You don't need to share the reason if you don't want to.
 - Were you aware of the priority services register before I mentioned it?

Moderator to note respondents from vulnerable households and households on PSR, probe as appropriate in following questions, and flag responses from these people in notes so that we can determine any differences in support received.

Company communication (20 minutes)

(35 – 55 mins)

Objective: Explore how effective company communications were during the incident

We're now going to talk about how South East Water responded to the incident. We're going to look at a few different elements of their response:

SHOW STIMULUS: Elements of response (1)

First we're going to look at what **communication** you might have had during the period in which you were experiencing problems with your water supply. *Nb. probe PSR/PSR-eligible respondents as appropriate and flag responses in notes*

NOTE TO MODERATOR – focus of the following questions is understanding the customer experience of South East Water's communications and the effectiveness of each type. In order to report this clearly, please link any comments back to the **SOURCE of communication**

e.g.:

- Letter
- Email
- Text
- Social Media post
- Website
- Call
- Visit in person

and INFORMATION TYPE e.g.:

- Cause of water issue
- Timeline for resolution of issue
- Advice on what to do and how to manage
- 'Standard' support available e.g. water stations
- Enhanced support available for those struggling or eligible for priority services e.g. water deliveries
- Water-saving advice/requirements e.g. hosepipe ban

- How did you first become aware of problems with the water supply in your area?
 - How long before you had problems did you hear about it, if at all?
 - *If heard about it before experiencing issues:* Where did you first hear about it? E.g. from water company, other organisation, agency, local community, news, social media, neighbours, friends (word of mouth)?
- Were you, or somebody else in your household, contacted by South East Water before or during the problems with your supply? E.g. *letter, text, email to somebody in household*
 - In which ways did you or the person in your household hear from them?
 - What type of information was included in communications you saw from South East Water? *For each type and source:*
 - How useful was the information given?
 - To what extent did it help you manage the situation, if at all?
 - How clear was the information given?
 - As far as you know, was the information factually correct?
 - At what point during the incident did you receive the first communication? To what extent did you get the right information at the right time?
 - How many of this type of communication did you receive? How frequently?
 - What was the tone of the communication? How did you feel about the tone?
- Did anyone here receive any texts from South East Water? If not, were you expecting to?

- Did anyone's household not receive any direct communications from South East Water e.g. *letter, text, email to somebody in household*
 - Why do you think your household didn't receive any communications? Are you or somebody in your household named on the water bill?
 - How did you feel about not having any direct communication from South East Water? How, if at all, did that change your/your household's experience of the incident?

- Did anyone here see any indirect communication from South East Water? For example on SEW's website, social media, local tv news, local radio?
 - Where did you see these indirect communications?
 - What type of information was included in the indirect communications you saw from South East Water? *For each type and source:*
 - At what point during the incident did you see it?
 - How useful was the information given?
 - To what extent did it help you manage the situation, if at all?
 - How clear was the information given?
 - As far as you know, was the information factually correct?
 - To what extent did you get the right information at the right time?
 - What was the tone of the communication? How did you feel about the tone?
 - How often, if at all, did you check for new communications and where did you look for these? How frequent were any updates that you saw?

- Overall, how did you feel about the amount of information provided by South East Water?
 - Too much, too little, about right?
 - Was there anything that you would have liked to have received more information about?
 - Were there any gaps in the information? What additional information, if any, would you like to see if this situation happened again?

- Did anyone here contact South East Water directly?
 - Why did you contact them? Was it for information, a complaint (formal or otherwise, or something else)?
 - How did you contact them – what channel did you use? How easy or difficult was it to make contact?
 - What happened? How did the company respond?
 - How did you feel about the interaction? What were the positives and negatives of contacting them directly?

- What, if anything, worked particularly well about South East Water's communications?

- How, if at all, would you improve the communication from South East Water during this kind of incident? *Allow spontaneous response, then probe:*
 - *Channel*
 - *Amount/frequency/timing of comms*
 - *Type/amount/clarity of information*
 - *Tone*

- For those of you who experienced other water supply issues over the last year, for example the freeze-thaw incident last December, how did the communication differ during this incident, if at all?
 - Was it better or worse? In what way?
- Were you in contact with any other organisations during the incident e.g. local council, CCW, Ofwat, charities etc?
 - If so, which ones?
 - Why were you in contact with them? E.g. respondent reached out to make complaint, respondent contacted by group who offered support etc
 - How useful was the contact? What did it achieve?

Company support during an incident (15 minutes)

(55 – 70 mins)

Objective: Explore how effective the provision of support was during and after the incident

Display stimulus – Elements of response (2)

We're now going to look at what **support** South East Water provided during the period in which you were experiencing problems with your water supply. *Nb. probe PSR/PSR-eligible respondents as appropriate and flag responses in notes*

- To what extent, if at all, do you feel that South East Water provided support to you and your household during the incident
 - What types of support did you receive from South East Water during the incident?
Allow spontaneous response
- As far as you know, were there water stations to collect water from?
 - Did you make use of them? If not, why not?
 - How did you find out about the stations?
 - How soon after you experienced a problem with your supply was a water station available to visit? How soon were you able to access a water station?
 - How did the stations work? How did they provide water?
 - Who were the stations staffed by? E.g. South East Water reps or someone else?
 - Where were these situated? How did you feel about the location of the stations?
How accessible were the stations?
 - How did you go about collecting water? E.g. mode of travel, frequency of visits etc
 - How did you find the process? What worked well/not so well?
 - How did you feel about the amount of water you received? How much do you think water companies have to provide to each person per day? The answer is 10L – do you feel that you received this much?
 - How did you feel about the amount of time you had to wait to collect your water?
 - How would you improve the process of collecting water?
- Was water delivered to you? *Moderator note – record if PSR/vulnerable didn't have water delivered*
 - How did you get the water delivered? E.g. requested it, delivered without asking
 - How did the delivery work? E.g. amount delivered, frequency etc
 - How did you find the process? What worked well/not so well?
 - How would you improve the process of receiving water?
- Did you receive a visit from the company?

- Why did you receive a visit from the company? *E.g. requested it, door to door visit etc.*
 - What was the purpose of the visit?
 - How did the visit make you feel?
- What other types of support did you receive, if any?
 - How useful was this support?
- Overall, how effective was the support that you received?
 - How appropriate was the amount of support that you received?
 - To what extent did you receive 'the right support at the right time'?
 - How did the support you received change over time, if at all?
- How, if at all, would you improve the provision of support for households like yours during this kind of incident?
 - What additional support or provisions would you have liked to receive?
 - What else, if anything, did your household need during the incident
- For those of you who experienced water supply issues over the last year, for example the freeze-thaw incident last December, how did the support differ during this incident, if at all?
 - Was it better or worse? In what way?
- What support did you receive from other organisations or agencies during the incident, if any?
 - How useful was this?

Company support after an incident (7.5 minutes)

(70 – 77.5 mins)

Objective: Explore how effective the provision of support was during the resolution phase and beyond

Display stimulus: Elements of response (3)

We're now going to look at what happened at the end of the incident and beyond. *Nb. probe PSR/PSR-eligible respondents as appropriate and flag responses in notes*

- Has the incident been fully resolved?
 - Is everything now back to normal with your water supply? If no, what problems are you still experiencing?
- How long did it take for things to go back to normal?
 - How does this compare with what South East Water told you?
 - How satisfied are you with the amount of time it took for the issue to be fully resolved?
- What communication, if any, have you received from South East Water since the issue was resolved?
 - What type of communication have you received? How many times?
 - What was the content of the communications? *Probe whether contained any information around actions taken to prevent/reduce impact of future supply issues*
 - How did you feel about the communications?

- For those of you who experienced water supply issues last December (the 'freeze-thaw incident'), how did the support after the incident differ during this one, if at all?
 - Was it better or worse? In what way?

Financial compensation (7.5 minutes)

(77.5 – 85 mins)

Objective: Understand the compensation process, amounts received and views on this

Display stimulus: Elements of response (4)

We're now going to talk about any compensation which you might have received. Let's start by exploring what requirements water companies might have to provide compensation.

- *Show of hands:* Are water companies legally required to provide compensation for this kind of incident? If yes:
 - What kind of compensation that might be? Can you name any kind of scheme which sets out what customers might be entitled to?
 - Where did you find out about this compensation?

SHOW STIMULUS: Guaranteed standards scheme

Guaranteed Standards Scheme

Standards of service

All customers of water and sewerage companies are entitled to guaranteed minimum standards of service, as laid down by the Government. These rights are known as the guaranteed standards scheme. Where a company fails to meet any of these standards of service then it is required to make a specified payment to the affected customer.

Compensation

Details of payments water companies must make to household customers if it does not meet its service standards for water supply are summarised below. There are occasional circumstances when these payments do not apply. In particular, payments may not apply when severe or exceptional weather has prevented them from meeting their standards.

- Incidences of low water pressure = £25
- Supply not restored (initial period) = £20
- Supply not restored (each further 24hrs) = £10

This slide shows what compensation water companies must offer customers in the event of this kind of incident.

- Has anyone here received any financial compensation from South East Water because of the water problems that took place (or been told they will receive it)?

If yes:

- What amount were you given?
 - What form did this take? (e.g. payment to account, deduction from bill)
 - How do you feel about the amount you were awarded? How fair do you feel the amount was?
 - How quickly did you receive it?

- How was the compensation referred to by South East Water e.g. 'compensation', 'goodwill', 'guaranteed standards scheme' or something else?
- How did you receive this?
 - Was it automatic or did you request it?
 - If you requested it, what process did you go through? What was South East Water's response?
 - How did you feel about the process to obtain compensation? How easy or difficult did you find it?
 - Are you aware that there is a complaints process if you need it?
 - What improvements, if any, would you make to the compensation process?

Looking ahead and wrap up (5 minutes)

(85 – 90 mins)

Objective: Explore how effective the provision of support was during and after the incident

We almost at the end of our session now – thanks so much for sharing your experiences. Before we go, I'd like to summarise how you felt South East Water handled the incident and what they should focus on if this kind of incident happens again.

- Thinking about what we've discussed today, on a scale of 0 – 10, where 0 is very poorly and 10 is very effectively, how well do you think South East Water handled this incident overall? (Get score from each in turn.)
- Please tell me one thing that you think South East Water did well and one thing that you think South East Water should focus on improving for any future incident. (Ask each in turn)
- (If time) Finally, how confident or not confident do you feel that South East Water would handle any future incident effectively?

Ok that's everything – thanks so much for your time today. You will receive your incentive payments within a week and they will be paid by Roots Research / Fieldmouse Research / Central Fieldwork who recruited you.

Finally, do you consent to being recontacted by the recruiter to give further feedback later in the summer, if you experience more problems with your water supply?