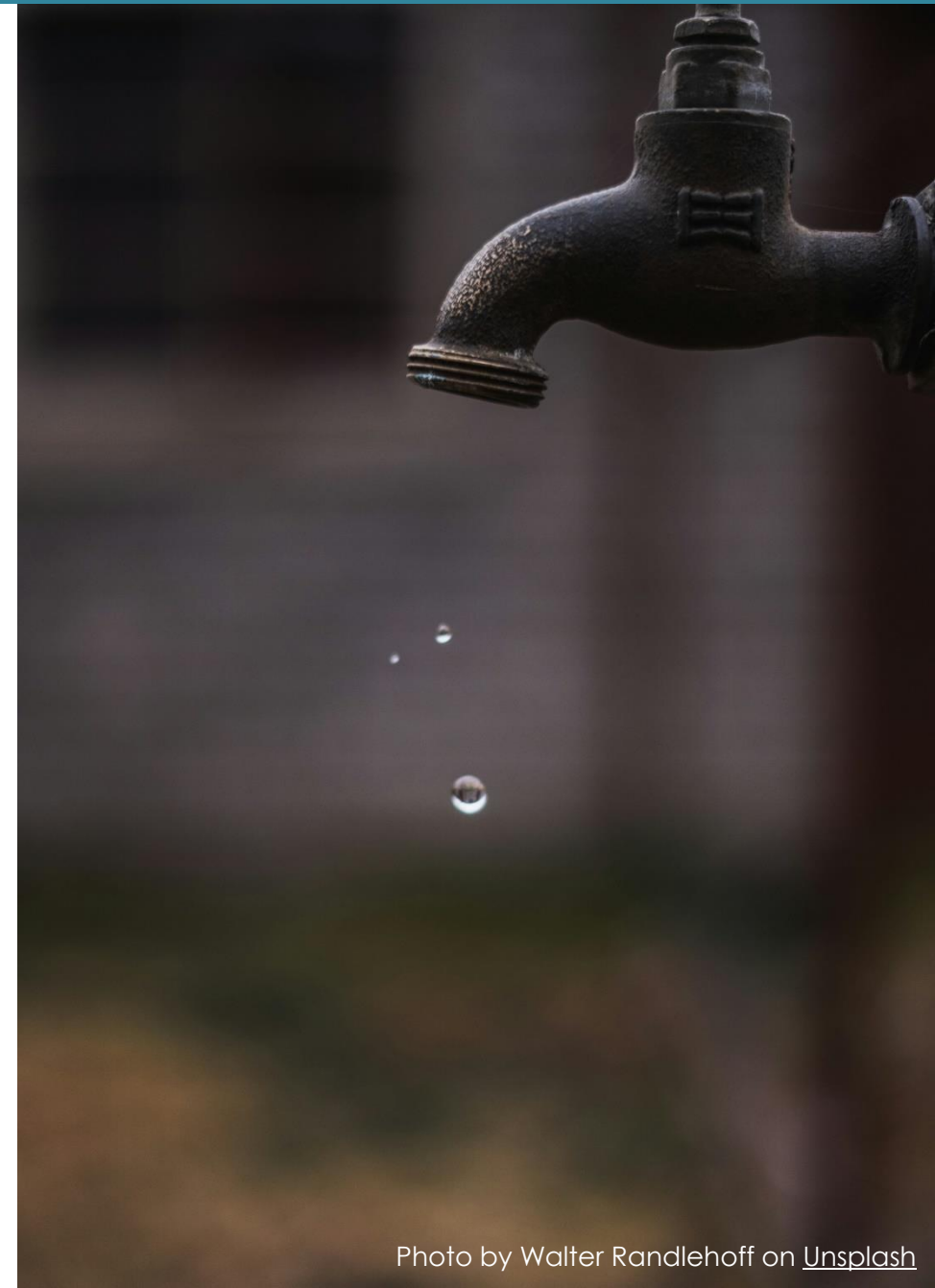


Research into incident response

**Yorkshire Water supply problems in Goole: Low pressure and no water
October - November 2023**

Report for Ofwat/CCW – March 2024

- 1 Background, objectives and method
- 2 Summary of findings
- 3 Participant experiences of the incident
- 4 Company communications
- 5 Support during incident
- 6 Support after incident
- 7 Lessons learnt



Background, objectives and method



Blue Marble was commissioned by Ofwat and CCW to conduct research with customers to understand their experiences when incidents take place. The research is primarily focused on water or wastewater-related incidents that affect people in their homes or gardens or going about their daily lives. The programme will generate findings which:

- 1 Help to better establish what customers' expectations of companies are when incidents occur and how well these expectations are met
- 2 Can be used by Ofwat and CCW to improve companies' responses and management of incidents and people's experiences when they take place
- 3 Support Ofwat's wider regulatory work and inform CCW's wider work on behalf of consumers

This report is the fourth within that programme of work. More information on the project is available at: <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/customer-insights-when-things-go-wrong/>



The objectives for this specific project (the fourth in the programme) are as follows:

- 1** Understand the views, experiences and expectations of affected Yorkshire Water household customers following low water pressure in Oct/Nov 2023, including views on Yorkshire Water's speed of response, support, and the transparency and framing of communication, compensation, and overall resolution.
- 2** Understand the range of disruption experienced and whether Yorkshire Water's assessment of the severity of the impact on customers is matched by those who were affected by it.
- 3** Determine any differences in the expectations and experiences of different customer groups affected by the incident.
- 4** Identify what parts of Yorkshire Water's response worked well and what could be improved.



Incident

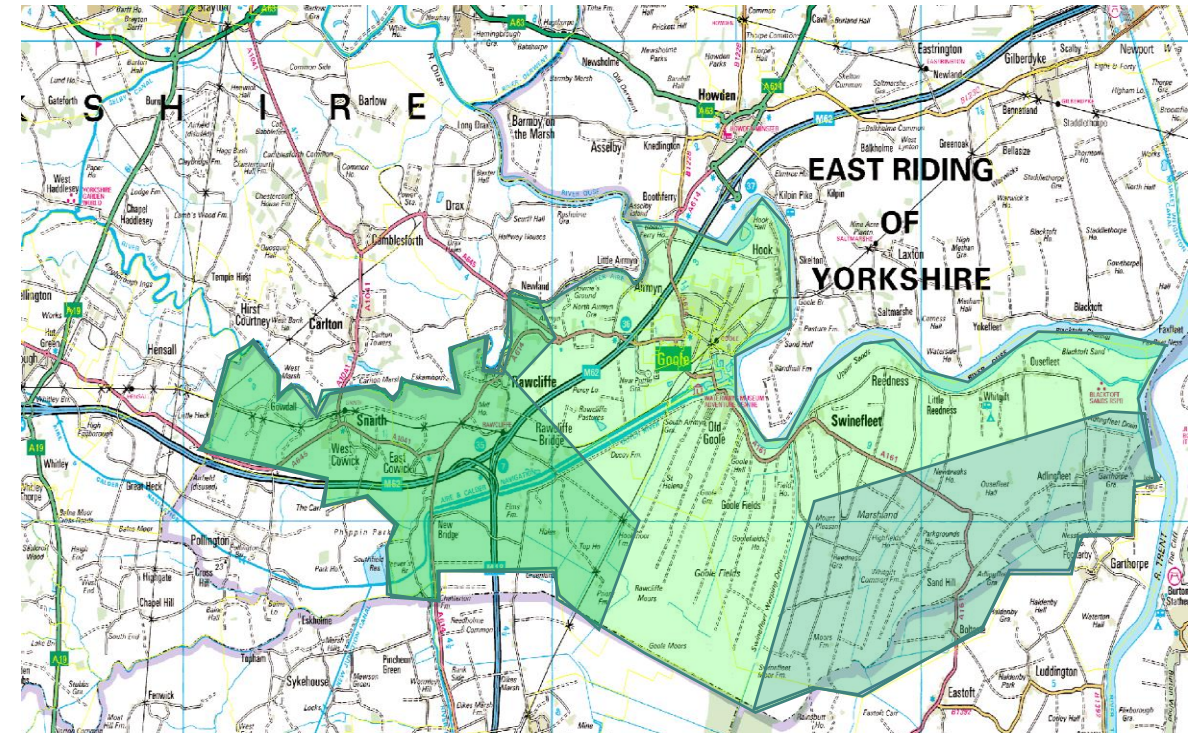
Between 27th October and 13th November 2023, 12,700 properties in Goole, Yorkshire were affected by problems with water supply and water pressure, including 661 customers on the Priority Services Register. The initial issue was caused by a pipe burst affecting a water tower, with multiple subsequent bursts occurring during re-pressurising of the system.

Impact

Yorkshire Water described the impact as ‘low pressure or periods of no water’ and this was supported by customer descriptions on social media, which also mentioned problems with discoloured water and sediment.

Communication

Yorkshire Water reported that it communicated about the incident via text, phone, social media, the website and the press. It also said that it delivered water to 44 PSR customers and set up a compensation scheme which reviews claims on a case-by-case basis. An overview of communication to customers as reported by Yorkshire Water is included in the appendix.



We conducted qualitative research with 27 customers from affected households in Goole to understand their experiences. Fieldwork was conducted online and via telephone.

Recruitment methods

- On the ground: e.g. leaving flyers in community spaces
- Social media: promoting the research via local FB groups
- Snowballing through recruited participants

Pre-task exercise

All were asked to complete 3 questions about their experiences of the incident. Participants were given the option to respond to this via video message, online survey or assisted telephone call.

3 x 90min focus groups (4-6 respondents per group)

12 x 45-60 min depths

1 Households with children aged 0-3

2 Households without dependent children

3 Vulnerable households

Vulnerable and contactors / complainants

Fieldwork dates: 12th December – 19th December

Sample specification structured to provide a range of experiences / perspectives:

- Demographic mix: socio economic grade; life stage; gender; range of vulnerabilities (health & economic)
- Priority Service Register - including some PSR-registered or PSR-eligible customers
- Access to transport (to include customers with no access to a car)
- Billing status – including some who were not billed directly (e.g. water supply is in landlord's name)

See detailed sample description in the appendix

Summary of findings



BLUE MARBLE

1

This incident is characterised by the breadth of experiences reported; as well as intermittent and trickling water, the manifestations of a low-pressure incident include having no water at all, discoloured or gritty water and being unable to use central heating. Affected households faced significant and prolonged disruption to their daily lives.

2

This was an unprecedented experience for participants. Whilst frustration was evident across the sample, researchers observed that many appeared resigned to their situation and 'just got on with it'. Households in vulnerable circumstances found coping harder and during the research were generally more vocal about the perceived lack of support from Yorkshire Water.

3

The vast majority received no direct communication and the information available from other sources was insufficient, with no projected timescale for resolution. Participants wanted more practical guidance, with confusion and conflicting information given over whether to e.g. drink the water or use the boiler.

4

Some participants were frustrated that an alternative water supply (bottled water stations or deliveries) was not proactively offered to them - especially vulnerable participants. Those who requested a water delivery felt the process was not well managed, for reasons that include slow response and poor communication.

5

Compensation was not granted automatically to those entitled to it, appearing to contradict Yorkshire Water's Customer Charter. Several respondents did not receive any money, either because they weren't aware compensation was available, they were unwilling to apply for it, or because their claim had not been actioned.

6

Participants' overall assessment was that Yorkshire Water had not handled the incident well, with limited and ineffectual communication at the heart of their frustration. However, where customers had contacted Yorkshire Water by phone, frustrations were often alleviated by high quality staff interactions.



Participant experiences of the incident



The experience of water supply issues varied greatly across households

Many types of issues experienced: though not all problems affected all households

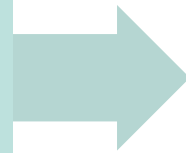
- Low / very low water pressure (e.g. just a trickle)
- No water at all
- Water at specific times, or only from certain taps
- Sediment in the water supply and/or discoloured water

Duration of incident varied widely

- The vast majority experienced issues for three or more days, with almost two thirds affected for over a week
- For some, issues were intermittent, for others the problems persisted until they were fixed

Physical impacts made it more challenging to:

- Stay hygienic, e.g. being able to flush the toilet, shower
- Stay hydrated – due to lack of water and unwillingness to drink
- Keep warm, e.g. not being able to turn on heating
- Cook
- Keep up with laundry



Customer response:

- Whilst voicing some frustration, most participants appeared resigned to their situation, referring to the incident as an 'inconvenience' that they could endure with adaptations to their behaviour and daily routines 'like going camping'
- Some took a philosophical approach, noting that 'unprecedented' issues happen from time to time, with a new appreciation for a constant supply of water
- Those in vulnerable circumstances tended to be more vocal, expressing frustration re. lack of support from Yorkshire Water

Most participants were unwilling to drink the water due to discoloration and sediment





Staying hydrated and fed during the water service/supply disruption

Almost all participants were at times unable to drink the tap water, either because there was not enough water coming out, or because it was discoloured or gritty.

- Most instead relied on bottled water bought at a supermarket, although some found that supplies had run out
- Several drank other beverages instead e.g. juices
- A few already had a stock of water at home
- A few participants filled all available receptacles when they did have enough water pressure, so they had water for drinking and cleaning
- Two participants called Yorkshire Water to check if they could drink the water; one of these did not trust advice that it was safe and did not consume it; the other blamed her child's subsequent diarrhoea on drinking it

As well as using bottled water to cook, a few:

- Ate foods that required limited water to prepare, such as ready-made microwave meals
- Ate fewer fresh foods that required washing first



Vulnerable participants and those on Priority Services Register

Those in vulnerable circumstances sometimes found it harder to access alternative water supplies:

- Less readily able to leave the house to purchase bottled water e.g. due to mental health issues or needing to get young children ready
- Often relied on support from the community and friends to be able to have drinkable water

Having restricted access to drinking water was more challenging for some vulnerable respondents:

- Needing water for taking medication
- Young children needing to drink more frequently

"I would give it an 8 [out of 10 in terms of difficulty], just because I suffer with mental health, I struggle to leave the house, so... anyone who would come to see me, they would bring me my water." *Household with dependent children, Health vulnerable*





Staying clean and comfortable during the water service/supply disruption

Household activities were disrupted because the water pressure was too low to run showers and some appliances, and many participants were unwilling to force it to run on low pressure or were worried that sediment in the water would damage it

- Many participants went elsewhere to bathe, including friends and relatives' houses, at work and at the leisure centre
- A few participants bathed or washed dishes when water pressure was higher, or could do so downstairs when there was no water upstairs
- One family used baby wipes to clean up after a sports event
- Many participants left their toilets unflushed while they waited several hours, or even days, for the cistern to refill
- Many participants avoided washing clothes for the entire period, although some took washing to others' houses, and a few, specifically those in physical jobs, used laundry services
- To stay warm without heating, some wore more clothes and one boiled bottled water for hot water bottles
- Some participants were able to use their boilers as usual, but a few who tried reported strange noises and another's boiler broke soon after, which they believe is due to sediment – a different respondent was advised by phone not to use the boiler for this reason



Vulnerable participants and those on Priority Services Register

Disrupted household routines had a significant impact for some vulnerable participants e.g.

- Health vulnerable respondents requiring regular bathing to manage a skin condition or ease pain
- Young children needing more frequent bathing and laundry e.g. wearing nappies, potty training

Some older and health vulnerable participants struggled with not using the heating

- One respondent found the cold caused pain in her surgery scars; she spent a week in her heated caravan
- An elderly participant used electric fan heaters

“With my skin disorder, if I don't keep up with it, it dries out and it becomes very irritating. I was not able to apply my emollient that I have to use in the shower. So that was quite uncomfortable.” *Health vulnerable*

The close-knit community helped many to cope better during the incident. Many had family or friends in the area that they could rely on for showering, laundry, drinking water and help with children.



Minor impacts

Major impacts



Minority of sample able to make small adaptations over a short timeframe

Approx. a third made manageable adaptations over a moderate timeframe

Approx. a half of the sample made extensive adaptations over an extended timeframe (most vulnerable/PSR participants fell into this group)

James *

- James is retired and lives with his wife
- They had intermittent water supply throughout the day, for about **12 hours in total**
- His wife keeps bottled water stocked to use for clothes steaming, so used for drinking
- They were unable to bathe as usual during the day, but were able to in the evening

Stephen *

- Stephen lives with his wife. They had **no water for two days and low pressure for an additional three days**
- They couldn't use the shower for the entire period and were inconvenienced by toilets being slow to refill
- They switched off their boiler as they were nervous about breaking it, using a kettle to boil water for bathing and going without heating

Kirsty *

- Kirsty lives with her husband and 3 kids, and is currently on maternity leave
- **Water issues lasted for a week**, including periods of no water, followed by discoloured water
- It was half-term, so not ideal having kids at home, and also trying to potty train. Was also concerned about children drinking discoloured water

Jenny *

- Jenny is retired, and her adult children live nearby
- She experienced **very low water pressure for 16 days**
- She was unable to bathe, do household chores, or turn on her heating for the entire period
- She was unable to remain at home and had to go to live with her daughter nearby, whose supply was unaffected by the incident

NB: observed impact on participants' lives did not necessarily correlate with their emotional response to the disruption: some experiencing more major impacts were relatively philosophical or accepting of what was for them an unprecedented situation.



* Names changed

When asked to **rank how well Yorkshire Water handled the incident** on a scale from 0 to 10, almost all participants gave a score of **3 or less**, denoting low satisfaction

- Participants tended to feel that Yorkshire Water did not handle the incident well. In general, this was due to **a perceived lack of communication and information**
- Participants generally wanted more information on **timelines for resolution**, and the **dos/don'ts** (e.g. whether to use their boiler). This is explored more in the following section

"I think, even though they appeared entirely shocked themselves by how it escalated, that they knew what they were about to carry out. They knew they were going to empty that water tower. They knew what could happen, so they should have been very well prepared for that." *Household with dependent children, scored 1/10*

When asked to **name one thing that Yorkshire Water did well during the incident**, participants struggled to mention anything other than compensation or some phone interactions

A few had **weak positive feelings towards:**

- Direct **interactions with call centre staff** from Yorkshire Water. Despite some frustrations that people had to reach out to Yorkshire Water to complain or seek support, many mentioned that staff were polite and quick to provide help where they could
- **Compensation** (for those that received it)

"Following up my complaints, and they did send somebody out. They did test the water. They did deliver the water that the gentleman said he would on the phone" *Household with dependent children, scored 1/10*

While many participants appeared to have **little faith** in Yorkshire Water, a few were **cautiously optimistic** when asked how effectively they think Yorkshire Water will handle future incidents

- Many felt that Yorkshire Water are **unlikely to improve** in the future

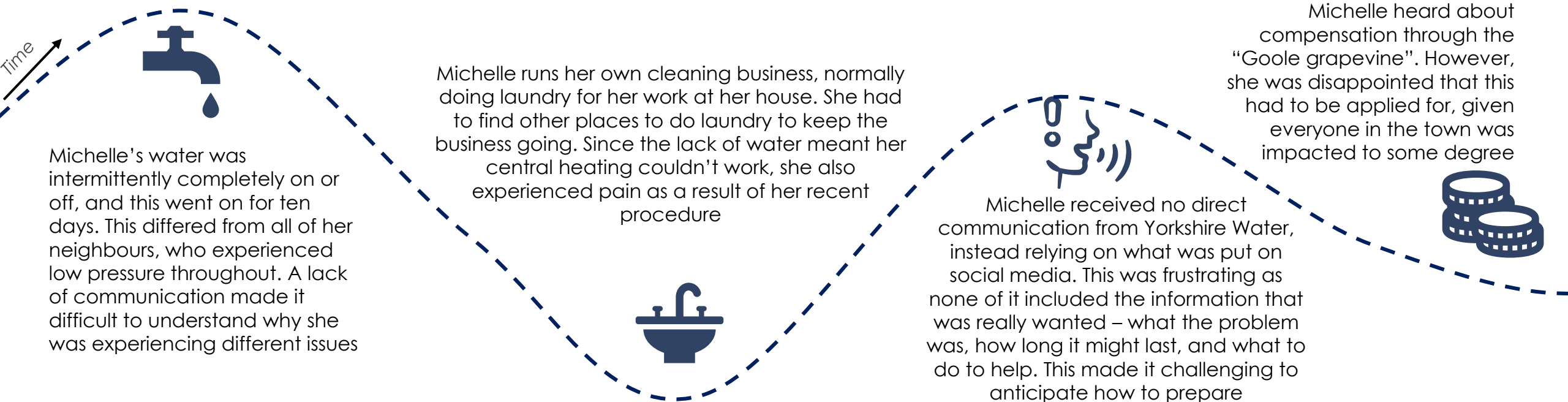
"They'll just handle it the same, won't they? ... We can't just switch water providers, they're our only option, so they can treat us however they want, and they will." *Health vulnerable, household with dependent children, scored 0/10*

- However, a few were optimistic that Yorkshire Water would **learn from its mistakes**

"Well, I would hope that they've learned from this incident. you know, for the future. I mean, mistakes do happen, and we learn from mistakes and I'm quietly confident this sort of incident won't happen again" *Health vulnerable, scored 3/10*



Michelle* lives in a household with her husband and two grown children. She runs her own cleaning business. Recently, she had a surgery that results in her struggling in the cold.



"The issue for us was not knowing what was happening."

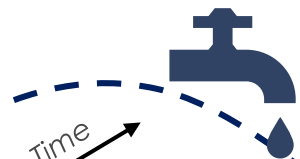
"The laundry didn't help at all, but it was the cold. It's not that long since I've had my [surgery], and being cold is, I can't explain the pain, it's awful. The first day or two wasn't too bad, but after that, once the house had really cooled down, there was no way it would warm up again."

"The irritating thing to me is, everybody has been affected by this, yet you have to apply for it [the compensation]. Surely they know which households are affected, why don't they just do it automatically, because everybody has been inconvenienced to a degree?"



* Name changed. Severity rating based on participant's perception of impact

Tess* lives in a household with her husband and two children, aged 11 and 4. She is a teaching assistant, her husband works in a physical job.



Time →

Tess had discoloured water, which lasted about 10 days. She saw information about the problem on the local Google Facebook page. She checked the Yorkshire Water website every few hours for updates, however, did not find this useful as there was no timeline given.

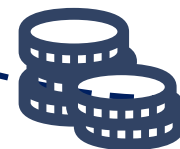
After two days, Tess called Yorkshire Water directly, after having difficulties finding the contact number. There was confusion in her dealings with Yorkshire Water, as initially they said she was on the PSR, but then later said she wasn't. She was unable to get any information on timelines on these calls. Her husband went to buy bottled water from the local Morrisons, but by that point it had all gone. Tess was advised in one of her calls that the water was safe to drink.



The incident ended up having a large impact on daily life, as her husband works a physical job and needs to bathe daily, and they had to flannel wash their children. Tess and her family were told the water was safe to drink by Yorkshire Water. However, they had doubts about this after their pet fish died, and one of their sons suffered from diarrhoea on day 8. Their doctor is unsure if this was caused by the water.



Yorkshire Water came to test her water after she complained this. She felt the testing was done too late, but understands they were very busy. Tess received an email response with the test results, which she found reassuring but felt was too late. She received compensation, but felt it wasn't enough compared to the problems they had experienced. Overall, Tess felt like her experience was worse because of poor communication from Yorkshire Water.



"I don't think I would have been offered any support if I hadn't rung up and complained."

"All I wanted to know was why is it happening, what are you doing to sort it, and is there a timeline? Basically, if she'd told me it was going to be another week, I'd have been not happy about that, but I could have expected what I'd need to arrange."

"So I'd like to think that they've learned from it, and I think they'd probably deal with it a lot differently if it happened again."



Company communications





Email



Post (leaflet / postcard)

- Vast majority of respondents did not receive any direct communication from Yorkshire Water, who have since confirmed that no emails, letters or leaflets were distributed
- Accordingly, most were unaware of the issues until they experienced them and needed to find information through indirect channels

“When we didn't have water pressure, that was the first we knew of it.” *Digitally excluded*



Text

- Only a few received a text, which came after the incident started
- These respondents described a generic message containing little useful information: “*We might have low pressure or low water, we're trying to fix it.*”
- Some respondents received a second text a few days later, with the same message repeated

“I tried to go on the website but it didn't help... there wasn't really any particular information.” *Health Vulnerable*



Website

- Some logged onto Yorkshire Water's website, a few having been prompted to do so by Yorkshire Water after complaining
- Felt to be slightly more useful, with issue logs giving updates on work to fix the problem
- Some thought this worked well – while others felt it did not contain the information they were looking for e.g. resolution timelines
- A few found it difficult to navigate, with the customer services number and enquiry forms ‘buried’

“...with lack of water and a low water pressure, we've got nothing from them. That's really shoddy from Yorkshire Water to actually do that. They're very quick to take the money and not so quick to provide a good service.” *Complainant*

Most were more frustrated by lack of communication than the impact of the incident itself

- People wanted to know how long the incident was likely to go on for so that they could cope better and plan more effectively – for example, one respondent had the opportunity to travel to live with his sister
- Many participants expected it to be a one-off, 24-48-hour incident and had no awareness that the disruption could return, fluctuate, and linger for a much longer period





Word of mouth

- Many learned from neighbours / friends / families living nearby when they first started experiencing issues
- The local community appears to be very close-knit, allowing for rapid exchange of information while 'in the dark'. Many mentioned going to see friends every day, helping each other out etc.

"We picked things up on social media because there's a good community board and we did get information out of there. People were obtaining information from Yorkshire Water and sharing it in there. We kept up to date with what was going on through that." *Complainant*



Social media

- Many people sourced information from their social media, notably from **several major community Facebooks groups** ("Going on in Goole" "Our Goole") – key channels amongst Goole residents
- Some respondents saw Yorkshire Water's posts on **Twitter** – but many more saw them as a repost on Facebook groups
 - People felt the posts from Yorkshire Water were too limited to be helpful
 - Also frustrated that they posted the same text in reply to any questions asked



Local MP

- Many also noted heavy involvement from the **local MP**, who actively reposted Yorkshire Water's content, demanded better compensation, and issued emails to constituents to keep people in the loop
 - Under the impression that their water company would be hard to reach, some respondents went to their MP for help, rather than Yorkshire Water

"I only found out further information because I went on [Yorkshire Water's] Twitter... Appalling. If you tweeted them to ask them a question on the tweet they had sent out, they would reply with the same thing... it was incredibly frustrating on Twitter." *Household with dependent children*

The strong sense of community in Goole aided 'grass roots' communication around the incident. These informal sources were more successful than Yorkshire Water's communications and helped people to navigate the situation themselves.



Amidst the lack of information, around half of participants contacted Yorkshire Water directly for one or more of the following purposes:

- To complain
- To ask about timescale
- To find out reasons for fluctuation
- To check if discoloured water was safe to drink
- To check if they could use the boiler / shower
- To claim / ask how to claim compensation

"I wanted some proper answers... I thought here we go again, it was Tuesday, one minute we had a little bit of water and then it was off again... So I rang through, I put my complaint through to someone, she seemed very sympathetic and then she just said 'I'll get someone to ring you back'... but it never happened, actually... I didn't get an answer." *Household without dependent children*

Customer experiences were mixed

- Most got through quickly or received callbacks / email response (see image) and staff were described as sympathetic, apologetic, and polite
- The information available was felt to be insufficient and a small number did not receive a promised callback

Some decided not to get in touch with Yorkshire Water, assuming that it would be hard to get through with so many other people attempting it at the same time

Case study – Phoebe*

Phoebe submitted a complaint online as she was very unhappy about not being able to run a bath due to low pressure and discoloured water leaving her bathtub stained. She received a call promptly from Yorkshire Water and the staff she spoke to were very apologetic. When she started having more issues a week later, she called Yorkshire Water again. They explained that there had been more pipe bursts and that she should buy bottled water if needed – she was satisfied with this response.

"We were completely unaware at that point (at beginning of the issues) that there was the possibility that it could be on off, on off, on off thing."
Complainant





What was received well?

- Phonenumber was **easy to get through**, with **friendly and polite frontline staff** who are thought to be good at their jobs
- Most participants' efforts to contact were promptly and properly **followed up**, e.g. callbacks after submitting enquiry, follow up calls before closing complaints
- Explanations around the cause of the issue were clear and widely communicated (though not necessarily through Yorkshire Water's own channels) – participants generally had a **good awareness of the context and cause** of the problem
- Most were happy with the **tone** in announcements, which was felt to be professional

"They kept saying it'll be today, definitely."
Vulnerable with dependent children

"I feel happy that because I raised a complaint with them, I feel they handled my complaint properly."
Complainant



Areas for improvement

- There was very little **proactive, official communication** from Yorkshire Water throughout the incident
 - Relying on indirect, online channels resulted in **an information gap** for anyone who did not think to go online, as well as for elderly / digitally excluded participants
- **Lack of desired information** around a projected timescale for resolution or saying that issues maybe intermittent
- Communications **lacked information and clarity over dos and don'ts** – there was some confusion over specific issues, e.g. whether to drink water or use boiler
- Information given was often **not useful or accurate** - e.g. social media responses were too generic to be helpful and didn't address the specific query or incident
- **Website needed to be improved** to help people access contact and compensation information more easily

"The frustration is that even on social media, it was just information coming from other neighbours, nothing from Yorkshire Water to say what the problem was, how long it might last for, or what to do to help. I think the worst of it was, you felt like you were in the dark, you had no idea what was going on, you're not told what the problem is so you can't anticipate how long it was going to last for."
Health Vulnerable





Scale of the incident:

- Cause of problem
- Severity of problem
- Resolution plan
- Likely duration of the incident

Early warnings for:

- Possibility for disruption fluctuations
- Possibility of multiple types of problem occurring
- Not using specific household appliances, boiler etc.



Timelines:

- Timely and frequent updates on resolution progress with clear timestamps on website, ideally a 'live' log
- Accuracy and honesty; be clear if the issue may take a while to resolve

Dos and don'ts:

- Guidance on drinking water, using household appliances etc
- Reassurance over water quality where this is in doubt – share results of quality inspection if conducted

Support:

- Available support and how to get it
- Planned compensation - specifically the need to retain receipts



Resolution:

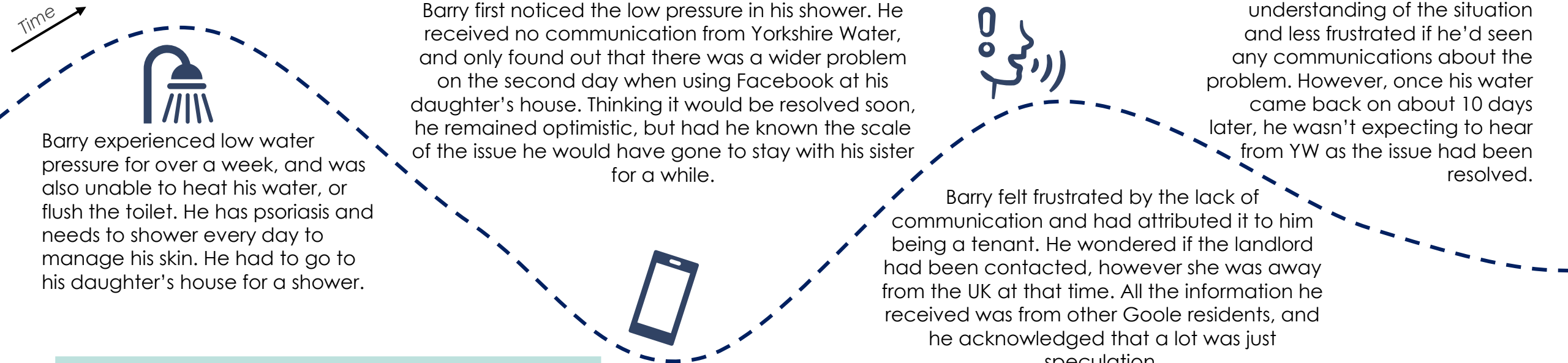
- Confirmation that the incident has been dealt with
- Apology for disruption caused
- Evidence that water company has learnt from the incident, planned improvements for future

Compensation:

- Compensation details (e.g. customer charter) proactively distributed to all customers affected
 - Amount of compensation
 - How calculations are made
 - Clear rationale for ineligibility
 - Process for claiming



Barry* lives in a flatshare above a pub, and his daughter lives nearby. He has recently acquired work after a period of being unemployed. He suffers from severe psoriasis, which requires regular maintenance. He is not on the PSR as he was not aware of it.



"My main problem really was flushing the toilets 'cause it was a bit of a smell, but also, like I said, with my skin disorder, if I don't keep up with it. It dries out and it becomes very irritating. I was not able to apply my emollient that I have to use in the shower. So that was quite uncomfortable... I just sort of adapted to it, and, you know, took it in my stride, and there was some uncomfortable moments."

"But as the trickle of information I was getting, I was, you know, convincing myself: 'Well, it should be done by tomorrow. It should be okay by tomorrow.' And I kept saying that over the period of that week, or that week and a half, or whatever it was."

"[I would have appreciated information] via email, text, or maybe a bulletin on Facebook, you know, from actual Yorkshire Water rather than me relying on people's word of mouth."



* Name changed. Severity rating based on participant's perception of impact

Support during incident





Some customers on the Priority Services Register are also registered to receive bottled water during service interruptions. During this event, only 44 of the 661 PSR households affected received water deliveries. Two PSR households which received water took part in this research. They felt support was not well-managed.

Lack of automatic provision to PSR customers registered for water deliveries

The only participants in the sample who received water deliveries had called to request it. They were frustrated that water was not provided automatically and felt that Yorkshire Water should have been more proactive in supporting PSR customers.

Slow delivery

Deliveries were not prompt; both participants needed to chase Yorkshire Water multiple times to ask when to expect delivery, with one participant receiving their water delivery almost two weeks after the incident began.

Poor communication around delivery

Both participants felt Yorkshire Water could have been better in providing them with updates. One had water delivered at a different time to that which had been communicated, meaning that they were not home when it was delivered and since it had been left on the ground, were unable to use it due to their specific vulnerability (see case study).

Case Study – Tania*, health vulnerable

Tania lives with her husband and young son. They experienced no water intermittently for about a week. Tania has severe OCD and found it very difficult to carry on with normal life, as she was unable to wash her hands regularly. Tania believed she was on the PSR but Yorkshire Water was unable to find her on it, and so had to re-register her when she called to request support. Water was delivered following multiple calls about the issue. While the water was appreciated, it was not delivered at the time previously communicated to her, so was left on the ground outside because they were not at home to receive it. This made Tania uncomfortable to use the water for drinking, so she only used it for bathing and cleaning.

“No one got any help with anything, they said to contact them if we needed help, but I contacted them on the 6th or 7th day, told them about the water situation, that it was back on but brown, they said they'd deliver some water, four days later still waiting.” *Health vulnerable, Household with dependent children*

“It felt rubbish having to call constantly.” *Health vulnerable, Household with dependent children*

* Name changed





PSR participants

- Some PSR participants did not know that support was available
- Other PSR participants found out about deliveries via Facebook but did not request it:
 - Could access enough water through other means so did not request it
 - Do not normally drink tap water, so had bottles already available

"I was never without drinking water, so never needed any direct support." *Health vulnerable*

Whilst many vulnerable participants felt that they could get by without a delivery, it is clear that others would have greatly benefitted from this support. There was strong desire across the sample for Yorkshire Water to support vulnerable members of the community by proactively distributing water to them, given they may have difficulty in accessing alternative supplies.

Vulnerable non-PSR participants

- Some non-PSR participants were not sure if they were eligible for support and so did not request it
- Where support was requested by a non-PSR participant, this was refused.
 - One participant with significant mental health issues - and a small child - called Yorkshire Water to request a delivery but was told she was not eligible.
- Most non-PSR participants had not heard of the Priority Services Register before the research
 - One participant has a severe skin condition which requires regular bathing to manage. He had not heard of the PSR before, so had not looked into registering. He saw water being delivered to nearby businesses and would have liked to have been offered it as well. He didn't think to contact Yorkshire Water during the incident, but also noted he did not have any credit on his phone so would have been unable to call in any case.

"Personally, I think they should've been out on the streets, giving water out... I think it was disgusting, to be honest, because there's a lot of people who can't carry big things [bottles] of water back home, not everybody has cars." *Household without dependent children*





For PSR customers

- Proactively reaching out to offer water deliveries to those signed up for this
- Follow-ups on delivery status
- Ensure customers know when water will be delivered

For the general population

- Clarity around other support on offer (e.g. whether there are water stations or not, reimbursement for any water purchased)

For PSR customers

- Automatic delivery to all PSR customers who are signed up for water deliveries

For the general population

- Explaining who receives water and why
- Consider providing water to all customers during longer service incidents

- More proactive provision of water to a wider group of vulnerable customers (not just those on the PSR)
- Easy route to request water urgently
- Ad-hoc water deliveries / drops around the community to provide water to those who need it, but may not reach out to request it
- Support for those who may not be able to transport water to their homes
- Increase awareness of the PSR so that those eligible can register



Support after incident



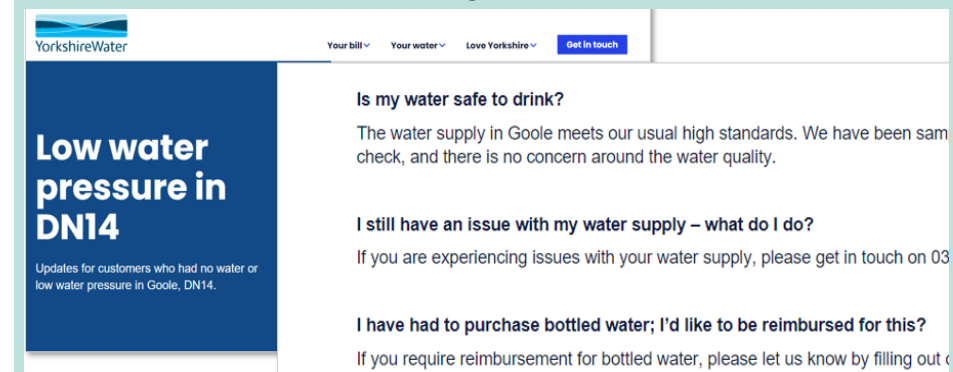
General communications since resolution

- No one received notification from Yorkshire Water when the incident had finished - apart from one complainant receiving a call back to close their case
- Nobody had received an explanation or apology about the incident, nor instructions on whether to resume drinking water or running the boiler

Information around compensation

- Most had no awareness of compensation information displayed on Yorkshire Water's website; a few saw it as a repost on community group or directed by MP / Yorkshire Water operators
- Informal networks largely helped distribute compensation information; the majority learned through Facebook, with many people, including the local MP, sharing details there
 - 'Second hand' information was not always accurate – e.g. some customers understood they would receive £25 for each day affected
- The MP also sent a blanket email directing constituents to the compensation enquiry form and giving information on where to lodge complaints
- Respondents generally felt Yorkshire Water were not active enough in publicising compensation; some felt they hoped that people would not see it

Compensation message displayed on website



"I feel like you really have to squeeze them for any support... Compensation that they can offer you, they really need to be more open about that." *Household with dependent children*

"I learnt from the Facebook group that it should have been £25 a day that you were experiencing low pressure. But when I approached them to ask whether there was a form or how did you apply for this money, they just sent me one amount of £25."
Complainant





Process of claiming compensation

- Around three quarters of participants applied for and received compensation after contacting Yorkshire Water, either by phone when complaining, or via an online form. They described an easy process, with quick responses and speedy payment
- Two participants applied for compensation but did not receive it - one was told by the operator she was not entitled to it because she did not “fit the basis”, while the other was unsure if his claim form had been received
- Several participants did not claim compensation:
 - Did not know it was available
 - Were unwilling to complete the claims form due to the time and effort required, or because they ‘didn’t want to ruffle feathers’ by being seen to complain
 - Did not feel the need to claim, again illustrating a lack of significant upset over the ‘inconvenience’

“For the time and amount it went out, it's a bit low isn't it?”
Complainant

“I was very pleasantly surprised because I didn't expect them to respond so quickly and so efficiently.”
Vulnerable

“In this day and age, generating a cheque and sending it out in the post is just a complete waste.”
Complainant



Amount of compensation

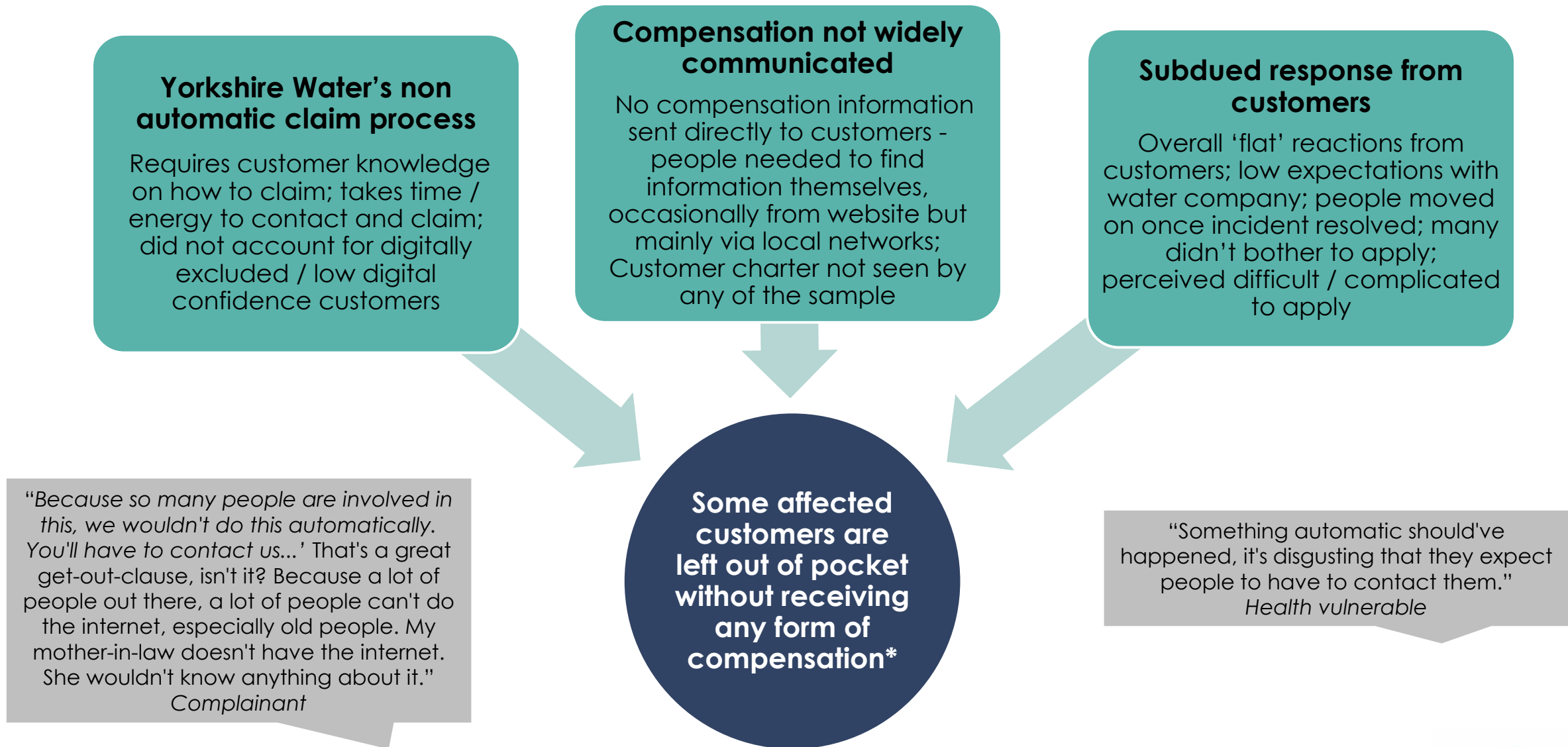
- Most were offered £25; those who complained further received extra payments of between £10 and £55
- An additional £5 was offered to those who had bought bottled water – however awareness of this was patchy and a few were frustrated that they could not claim for more than £5 without retaining their receipts
- The amount of compensation was seen as adequate; a ‘better than nothing’ payment, with no rationale behind it
- Complainants and those who experienced extended disruptions felt it should be higher, considering the length of disruption and how much they paid for water



Delivery of compensation

- Most received a bank transfer
- A few were sent a cheque, which was perceived as old-fashioned and inconvenient; they would have preferred an alternative, but not given a choice





*Note: At the time of writing, Yorkshire Water is still reviewing the incident and what compensation customers are entitled to.



Participants felt that Yorkshire Water had not delivered what was promised in its Customer Charter

Having explored participants' experiences of the compensation process, we then displayed information about Yorkshire Water's Customer Charter for water pressure, planned work, and unplanned work (see appendix for stimulus). No one had seen these before the interview.

Most felt the compensation scheme laid out in the charter falls within their expectations

- Participants were broadly happy with the content, finding it to be 'fair' and 'reasonable'
 - ✓ A few thought that compensation of '10% off the bill' was particularly noteworthy
- Some were confused over certain descriptions relating to circumstances for compensation:
 - ? What defines 'regular inconvenience'?
 - ? No participants knew what 'seven meter static head' meant
- Some noted that they hadn't seen this information before and questioned why it was not more accessible to customers

"They definitely should be giving us 10% off our bill." *Household with dependent children*

"They haven't automatically paid everyone, and they definitely haven't paid them within 10 working days." *Health vulnerable*

"Why should you have to claim anyway? They know everybody's been affected." *Household without dependent children*

Participants were upset that what appears to be promised in the charter does not align with their actual experiences

- In the charter, Yorkshire Water appeared to guarantee automatic compensation to everyone affected and further compensation if disruption continues for longer periods
- This triggered confusion and frustration among participants who felt these obligations had not been met. Some concluded that they should have received much higher compensation than they did
- Most participants perceived that Yorkshire Water was evading responsibility by not making compensation automatic. When one respondent asked on the phone why it was not offered to everyone, Yorkshire Water explained that the incident was an 'unprecedented situation'; the respondent deemed this an unacceptable excuse

"So that's saying really they should have paid everybody who experienced low water pressure automatically without them claiming it... Because what I've also seen was that they were going to award compensation on a case-by-case basis. Those were the words that they used." *Complainant*





- Offer compensation in the way and amount promised in the Customer Charter
- Make payments automatic so process is as easy as possible
- Proactively spread compensation information
- Reach out to customers so no group is at risk of being left out



- Send money via customers' preferred payment methods – explain rationale if this is not possible
- Let people know beforehand if receipts are required for bottled water – if compensation is available, notify people before they need to buy



- Proactively announce that water is safe to drink
- Contact customers to apologise for the incident
- Explain what happened and what steps the company has taken to rectify the situation
- Provide contact information if customers still experience problems



Carl* is retired and lives with his wife. Their children live close by. His household is registered on the PSR due to his wife's heart condition. When the incident occurred his sister, brother-in-law, and nephew were also staying with them for a long weekend.



Carl experienced low pressure for 11 days coinciding with family staying to compete in a local 10k run. With low pressure, they were unable to shower - a great annoyance with 5 sweaty adults in the house. They went to the leisure centre to shower, Only to find it closed due to the incident. His nephew unknowingly turned on the shower, causing it to trip requiring an electrician to fix the problem.

Carl received no contact from Yorkshire Water, and followed up with the incident on Facebook as he noticed people complaining. Carl ended up contacting Yorkshire Water to complain, as he was annoyed about the lack of water needed for shower.



Carl found his complaint manager to be very good. They reached out to him and apologised, explained the issue, and offered him a £25 compensation. In a follow up call, Carl informed them of his shower problem in this period and received a further £25 compensation. He was happy with the complaints process and receiving compensation.

Carl was however confused that he had to receive the compensation as cheques in the post, which he found to be very old-fashioned. He was annoyed that he had to physically go to a bank, and wasn't offered a choice in how he received the compensation.



"So this was really a bad time for us. I'd got a house full of sweaty runners!" Carl

"They were really, really bad. So we had to resort to just wiping down with wet wipes. When we came back from the race on Sunday, we just had to wipe down in wet wipes, which is not very good." Carl

"He said to me straight away, because you've raised a complaint with us, I'm immediately sending you £25 as a goodwill gesture because of your disruption but I won't close your case. I explained to him I'm having guests. He said, look, when I feel that we've sorted the infrastructure problems out in the area, I will ring you back to close your complaint down. That's what he did. He did what he said he'd do." Carl



* Name changed. Severity rating based on participant's perception of impact

Lessons learnt



1

In line with findings from other incidents in this research programme, communication is key to customers' experience of an incident, and informs perceptions of their company

- Companies should ensure that all customers affected by an incident receive direct communications around the incident; contact databases must be comprehensive and up-to-date and companies should use a range of digital and non-digital channels.
- Companies should be open and honest in their communication. The information they provide must be regular, accurate and timely. For example, when a company has a reasonable indication of the likely length of an incident, they should share this with customers, and update them if it changes. If they do not have the information to be specific, they should say so, as well as what they are doing to find out and when they will have specifics. Communications must be realistic and not raise expectations of people affected unreasonably.
- Proactive communications about the 'dos and don'ts' relating to an incident are particularly important where household actions (or inactions) could result in further disruption – such as damaged appliances or boilers.
- As good practice, companies should enable customers who want to contact them to do so easily through their preferred channel, making it easy to locate relevant contact details.
- The content and tone of any communications should show empathy and consider that water supply problems are very stressful and difficult for people to manage.



2

During an incident, companies should deliver high quality and consistent levels of support to customers

- Companies should categorise the nature of an ongoing water service incident with consideration to vulnerable consumers and those on PSR, as the categorisation determines the level of support (e.g. deliveries of bottled water, water stations) that is provided. The research found that support provided to those with vulnerabilities was inadequate, whether already on PSR or not, because the categorisation of the incident did not trigger the wide spread delivery of bottled water or deployment of water stations, despite supply disruption over several days.
- Where appropriate, companies should automatically provide relevant support to customers on the Priority Services Register, rather than requiring them to request it. Vulnerable customers – who may not be on the Register – should be able to request a water delivery if they need it and companies must respond.
- Support must be prompt and well communicated, with proactive updates on the status of deliveries and accurate notification of time of delivery.
- As good practice, companies should consider providing an adequate, accessible alternative supply of water to all customers when problems continue for several days, and coping becomes increasingly difficult.

3

Post incident management is necessary for all customers

- Companies should explain to customers what they are doing to prevent any recurrence of the incident. They should offer a genuine apology for the disruption experienced, even if the cause was felt to be out of the company's control.
- Companies should ensure their customers understand the process for compensation and what they are entitled to as part of any company or industry schemes or charters.
- Companies should have clear and well-publicised information about any compensation schemes on their website and other communications, ensuring that all eligible customers receive the appropriate compensation in a reasonable timescale.
- Companies should take the opportunity in post-incident communications to raise awareness of their PSR and the additional practical assistance they can give to people in vulnerable circumstances.



Appendix



Yorkshire Water's summary of communication to customers	
27 th October	Direct text message to customers impacted by initial burst where details held
28 th October	Updates posted on social media ; Direct text message (where details held) to customers impacted by low pressure issues.
29 th October	Direct text message sent to customers impacted by additional burst; Information and apology to customers posted on social media channels; Updates posted on social media.
30 th October	Updates posted on social media ; Targeted social media adverts; Direct text message to those impacted by low pressure issues; Banner on website homepage; Dedicated incident web page with FAQs; FAQs added to call handlers briefing to aid customer experience; Update to local media
31 st October	Update to webpage to reflect customer compensation offer
1 st November	Update to website to reflect improved pressure seen by customers; Direct text message sent to customers impacted by additional burst; Updates posted on social media
2 nd November	Update to local broadcast and print media ; Direct text message sent to customers impacted by additional burst
3 rd November	Customer service representatives on site at Goole Water Tower to provide support to customers; Website updated to reflect changing operational picture; Update to local broadcast and print media ; Spokesperson interview with BBC Look North; Direct text message sent to customers impacted by additional burst
4 th November	Customer service representatives on site at Goole Water Tower to provide support to customers; Direct text message sent to customers impacted by additional burst
5 th November	Direct text message sent to customers impacted by additional bursts; Customer service representatives on site at Goole Water Tower to provide support to customers; Web page updated with additional details of customer reps and a link to the 'In Your Area' map where customers could search their postcode to understand any issues nearby
6 th November	Update provided to local media
7 th November	Update to website to reflect operational updates; Update provided to local media
8 th November	Update to local media ; Update to website to manage customer expectations – possible supply issues due to small bursts; Update to 'In Your Area' map
9 th November	Update to local media ; Announcement of community fund as a thank you for customer patience
10 th November	Update to website to reflect reduced customer impact

Methodology: additional detail

We conducted qualitative research with 27 customers from affected areas around Goole, to understand participants' experiences first-hand. Fieldwork was conducted online and via telephone.

Pre-task exercise

All were asked to complete 3 questions about their experiences of the incident. Participants were given the option to respond to this via video message, online survey or assisted telephone call.

3 x 90min focus groups (4-6 respondents per group)

12 x 45-60 min depths

Households with dependent children aged 0-18

Households without dependent children

Vulnerable households

Vulnerable and contactors / complainants

Good mix of demographics across sample

- 19 x <60, 8 x 60+; 16 x ABC1, 10 x C2DE;
- 10 contacted or complained to Yorkshire Water

Range of vulnerabilities:

- 16 x health condition impacting daily life; mental health condition; physical disability; immunocompromised
- 6 x on PSR (for severe allergies; anxiety and depression; gall bladder disease; OCD; heart condition x 2) *
- 10 x households with children 0-5
- 3 x digitally excluded
- 4 x living alone
- 14 x financially vulnerable (Currently struggle to pay all or some household bills PLUS total household income > £21k per annum AND/OR in receipt of benefits)

Recruitment involved several methods

- On the ground: e.g. leaving flyers in community spaces
- Social media: promoting the research via local FB groups
- Snowballing through recruited participants

The sample specification was structured to provide a range of experiences and perspectives on the incident, including:

- Demographic mix: socio economic grade; life stage; gender; range of vulnerabilities (health & economic)
- Priority Service Register - including some PSR-registered or PSR-eligible customers
- Access to transport (to include customers with no access to a car)
- Billing status – including some who were not billed directly (e.g. water supply is in landlord's name)

Fieldwork dates:
12th December – 19th December



Priority Services Register – Who are these services for?

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





Low water pressure in DN14

Updates for customers who had no water or low water pressure in Goole, DN14.

Is my water safe to drink?

The water supply in Goole meets our usual high standards. We have been sampling the water to check, and there is no concern around the water quality.

I still have an issue with my water supply – what do I do?

If you are experiencing issues with your water supply, please get in touch on 03451242424

I have had to purchase bottled water; I'd like to be reimbursed for this?

If you require reimbursement for bottled water, please let us know by filling out our [General enquiries form](#) with details of your query. If you have had to spend more than £5 to purchase the water, please include a receipt.

Will I receive compensation?

We know that low pressure can be inconvenient for customers and we will review claims for compensation on a case by case basis. If customers have purchased their own bottled water, then we will reimburse them.

Water pressure		
Incident	How much we’ll pay you	How we’ll pay you
Following an investigation, if the pressure in our communication pipe to your property falls below seven metre static head on two occasions, each of the less than one hour, within a 28-day period.	£25	Automatically
If we fail the above and don’t make the payment to you within 10 working days	£20	Claim – within three months of the event
If we regularly inconvenience you due to abnormally high or low pressure.	£25	Claim – within three months of the event
We’ll also consider claims for loses or damage that your own insurance does not cover	Variable – based on individual circumstances	Claim – within three months of the event



Planned work – water supply

Incident	How much we’ll pay you	How we’ll pay you
We’ll warn you, giving 48 hours notice, if we plan to interrupt your water supply for more than four hours	£20 if we fail to give you notice (+£30 for every subsequent 12 hours)	Automatically
Where we’ve warned you in advance we’ll restore your supply by the time stated	£30	Automatically
If we fail the above and don’t make the payment to you within 20 working days	£20	Automatically
We’ll warn you, giving 24 hours notice if we plan to interrupt your water supply for between 30 minutes and four hours.	£20	Claim – within three months of the event
We’ll provide alternative supplies for any interruption for more than 5 hours	£20	Claim – within three months of the event
For planned work, we’ll not interrupt your supply for more than 12 hours on any occasion	£20	Claim – within three months of the event



Emergency (unplanned) work – water supply

Incident	How much we’ll pay you	How we’ll pay you
For emergency work, we’ll restore your supply within 12 hours	£30 (+£30 for every subsequent 12 hours)	Automatically
If we fail the above and don’t make the payment to you within 20 working days	£20	Automatically
If we interrupt your supply to carry out emergency work on three or more occasions totalling over 15 hours within a 12 month period	10% off bill	Claim – within three months of the event
We’ll provide alternative supplies for any interruption for more than five hours	£20	Claim – within three months of the event





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