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Contents

Appendix A: introduction

1. Research context

The water industry in the UK

Water and sewerage companies are regional monopolies, with dedicated infrastructure to supply water and provide sewerage services. They bill household customers directly, and customers cannot choose or switch their supplier.

For non-household customers, water and sewerage services are provided by supply companies (wholesalers) via retailers, which compete for customers. Whilst most non-household customers can switch retailers, they cannot choose their supplier.

Due to this largely monopoly status, the water industry is regulated by statutory bodies to ensure that it meets its obligations and delivers value for consumers and the environment.

Ofwat is the economic regulator and sets wholesale price limits and performance targets for each company as part of its five yearly price review process. Companies must provide evidence to the regulator that they've consulted customers and stakeholders when developing their plans as part of this process.

CCW is the statutory independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales, championing the interests of consumers and influencing water companies, governments and regulators.

Public scrutiny on the water industry is increasing

The water industry has entered an era of increased public scrutiny, following several years of campaigns and media interest about issues including river quality and sewage management. In tandem, public awareness of the financial status and management of some water companies, and practices that have resulted in large fines, has grown. The idea of nationalisation regularly makes headlines, and customer trust has fallen to a 14-year low[1], with satisfaction and value for money scores in decline.

Water bills in England and Wales rose by an average of 6.3% in cash terms in 2024/25 (due to inflation and price limits agreed during PR19).[2] Since completion of this research, Ofwat's final PR24 determinations have been announced for 2025 – 2030.[3] This will mean bills will further increase, with many companies frontloading bill rises substantially to enable them to start work on planned investments.[4] This comes in a challenging economic climate, with many customers struggling with the cost of living, and bills rising across goods and services.

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[1] https://www.ccw.org.uk/publication/water-matters-2024/
[2] https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8931/
[3] Six water companies have appealed Ofwat's Final Determination to the Competition and Market's Authority: Competition and Markets Authority references - Ofwat. If a company's appeal leads to a change in its price controls then this will be reflected in bills for subsequent years after 2025-2026 .
[4] https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/ofwat-approves-104bn-upgrade-to-accelerate-delivery-of-cleaner-rivers-and-seas-and-secure-long-term-drinking-water-supplies-for-customers/

Regulatory context for water company consumer relations is changing

The regulatory context is changing too, with increasing strategic focus on transforming water company performance through new standards, including the new customer-focused licence condition, the Paying Fair guidelines, and planned changes to the amount of compensation available for standards which are not met.[5]

In February 2024, the Government passed the Water (Special Measures) Bill which, since fieldwork concluded, has now received Royal Assent and become the Water (Special measures) Act. The aim of the bill is to make sure water companies are better held to account where they have failed to deliver for the environment and customers. This includes giving consumers *"the power to summon board members and hold water executives to account"* through *"powerful new customer panels"'*.[6]

Research context for Report 1: Research and engagement

In 2020, Blue Marble conducted *Engaging water customers for better consumer and business outcomes* for CCW.[7] This research was used to inform the industry about how to explore customer views in a way that is meaningful and adds value to decision making.

We found that consumers felt bewildered by complex jargon and theoretical concepts used in some water sector research (especially during business planning). Low levels of underlying interest in water-related topics were accentuated when they were asked about irrelevant or unfamiliar topics, experience of poor research design in the past had led respondents to feel that their views are not that valuable, and respondents questioned whether companies do anything in response to consumers' input.

This 2020 report made some important conclusions that fed into Ofwat's principles for conducting high quality research and engagement in the sector, including the need to:

1. Prioritise the respondent experience e.g. through piloted and cognitive tested research materials, tailored to customer segments

2. Describe the context and relevance of every research exercise - and how consumer input will be acted upon by the water industry.

3. Make greater use of Business as usual (BAU) research and insight to determine current consumer priorities, particularly with vulnerable, future and non-household customers.

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[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/water-and-sewerage-changes-to-the-service-standards/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response#government-response
[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-law-to-ban-bonuses-for-polluting-water-bosses
[7] https://www.ccw.org.uk/app/uploads/2020/05/Engaging-water-customers-for-better-consumer-and-business-outcomes.pdf

2. How to read the reports

In navigating these new reports, it is useful to note that:

- Chapter 6 'Principles', aims to provide a summary of what participants see as key guidelines for consumer engagement and research/accountability.

- Chapter 7 provides more detailed findings and analysis relating to the principles and key research questions. The data in this chapter broadly, but not wholly, aligns with the participant journey through the topic and research questions. For readability, Chapter 7 is based on the data from the main Citizen Panel, with any key differences from consumers with incidents experience or consumers in Wales noted.

- Chapter 8 covers findings from sub-audience engagement, using data from research with: Consumers who need extra help; Future and young customers; Non-household customers. It largely reports on any divergence from Citizen Panel findings.

The report includes analytical commentary on observational data, individual data, and group data. Findings are reported following the key themes that emerged from analysis. Where multiple views on an issue are presented, more prominent views are generally reported first. Where appropriate we use non-specific quantifiers to give relative weighting to qualitative data.

- 'Most' when nearly all participants shared a similar view.

- 'A majority' when more than half, but fewer than most participants shared a similar view.

- 'A minority' when less than half, but more than a few participants shared a similar view.

- 'A few' when a small number of participants shared a similar view.

3. Key terms

Terms	
Consumer research	When companies seek the views of consumers e.g. through surveys, polls, interviews, focus groups and workshops.
Consumer engagement	When companies engage with consumers through activities which have wider objectives in addition to gaining insight, such as informing audiences and working collaboratively on decisions and solutions.
Consumer accountability – in the business context	This definition was used with participants, acknowledging there are others: Companies being answerable to their customers for delivering what they said they would do, and how they handle things if they go wrong.
Water company	To mean water and sewerage supplier. For some consumers, this is one company, and for others two separate companies.

	The website linked here has more information about the different areas each company covers.
Storm overflows	Referring to 'combined sewer overflows', or by the participants as 'sewage dumping'.
Everyday services	Used to refer to the activities carried out by companies in the day-to-day delivery of water and sewerage services.
Business planning	Used to refer to both the development of new plans for the price review every 5 years, and for targeted and longer-term strategies.
Audience labels	
Consumer / Householder / People	To refer to the views of the domestic sample that participated in the Citizen Panel process, broadly representative of the adult public in England and Wales.
Future customer	People who are not current bill-payers and typically under-28 years.
Consumers who need extra help	Often referred to in the sector as 'vulnerable' people, or people in 'vulnerable circumstances'.
Non-household customer	Organisations and businesses who pay bills as non-households rather than as domestic customers.
Citizen Panel	To refer to the 70 consumers taking part in the longitudinal, deliberative element of this research.

Appendix B: method
1. Recruitment

Overview of approach

In total, 110 participants were recruited to take part in the research. People were screened on age, gender, socioeconomic grade, location, ethnicity, water consumption, environmental attitudes, and other water customer criteria to ensure a strong qualitative sample broadly representative of England and Wales. This included recruiting respondents of varying demographics, future customers, non-household customers, consumers who need extra help and those with experience of water supply incidents over the past 2 years.

As the project involved discussing best practice in research methodology, we also recruited a proportion of our sample to be past participants in water or other utilities research – so that they could draw on their previous experiences when thinking about what research should look in the future.

70 people were recruited to take part in a multi-stage deliberative Citizen Panel, with a combination of in-person and online events, and activities on an online platform.

Out of the 70 Citizen Panel respondents, there was an average of 67 respondents who attended the main discussion events, and 48 participants completed all activities.

Findings from the Citizen Panel were complemented by depth interviews with:

20 household consumers who need extra help (terminology used by Ofwat[8], but often referred to in the utilities sector as consumers in vulnerable circumstances). They were recruited to cover a range of circumstances, recognising that character and identities are intersectional and can combine to create different and compounding disadvantages and privileges. We sought a mix of criteria across: PSR status, low-income, health, digital exclusion, and limited English proficiency. We sought to include those especially reliant on water services: people who need a reliable supply, who would find it harder to manage if their water supply was disrupted, or those who need to use additional water.

20 non-household consumers, covering a range of sectors, sizes, levels of water use, and purpose of water use to their organisation/business.

Recruitment partners

We worked with BEAM Fieldwork and Central Fieldwork to recruit respondents. BEAM Fieldwork recruited respondents for the Citizen Panel, and consumers who need extra help and non-household customer for depth interviews. Central Fieldwork recruited respondents who had experiences with water supply incidents for the Citizen Panel.

Incentives

Respondents were paid incentives for attending events and completing tasks online. Incentives were as follows:

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8 https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/regulated-companies/vulnerability/service-for-all-vulnerability-guidance/

Citizen Panel	
Webinar	£40
Event 1 in-person workshop	£100
At-home tasks X 4	£15 X 4
Event 2 online workshop	£50
Bonus completing all activities	£25
Total	£275
Future/Young customer online additional event	£40
Consumers who need extra help	
Depth interview	£80
Non-household customers	
Depth interview	£120

2. Sample details

Sample summary						
Region	Central & Eastern	Incidents experience	Northern	Wales	West & South West	Total
Water companies	*South Staffs, Severn Trent*	*Mixed locations*	*Yorkshire Water*	*Dŵr Cymru, Hafren Dyfrdwy*	*Wessex Water, Bristol Water*	
Location	*Birmingham*	*South East & mixed locations*	*Leeds*	*Deeside*	*Bristol*	
Citizen Panel (no. future customers in brackets)	14 (4)	14 (2)	14 (2)	14 (3)	14 (4)	**70**
Consumers who need extra help	2	5	5	4	4	**20**
Non-household customers (NHH)	4	4	4	4	4	**20**
Total	**20**	**23**	**23**	**22**	**22**	**110**

Citizen panel – household customer sample 70		Quotas (desired)*	Quotas (Achieved)	
Sample criteria	All to be water bill payers + 8 future customers	60 + 10 future customers	60 + 10 future customers	
Geography	Urban/suburban	51	55	
	Rural	19	15	
SEG	ABC1	39	38	
	C2DE	31	32	
Gender	Male	35	38	
	Female	35	32	
Age	18-24	7 + 10 future customers (under 28 ideally)	4 + 8 future customers	
	25-34	10	14 + 2 future customers	
	35-44	11	12	
	45-54	10	14	
	55-64	10	8	
	65+	12	8	
Ethnicity	White	54	58	
	Asian or Asian British	8	7	
	Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British	4	4	
	Mixed or Multiple or other Ethnic Groups	4	1	
Customer criteria*	Metered/unmetered	Recruit a mix	Yes	35
			No	33
			N/A	2
	Experience of significant disruption – something that lasted 12-24+ hours - to water and/or sewerage service for their household (business) e.g. has experienced a loss of water supply / multiple low pressure problems / boil water notice / do not use or drink notice/ discoloured water / sewage flooding in homes or gardens	Min. 19	20	
	Has been in touch with their water company in last 12 months Or has previously made a complaint	Min. 12	33	
	Mix of water companies	Min 6 companies	7	
	Experience participating in water company research (energy network research or other utility research as proxy if needed)	Min. 28	26	

		Quotas (Desired)	Quotas (Achieved)
Household water bill level	Low (household bill <£400)	Min. 12	22
	Medium (household bill £400-£600)	Min. 24	28
	High (household bill £600+)	Min. 12	20
Environmental attitudes	High engagement	Min. 8	14
	Moderate engagement	Min. 32	40
	Low engagement	Min. 16	16
Vulnerability	Have one or more vulnerability indicators	Min. 25	25

*Some quotas were relaxed, in order to prioritise including people with experience of disruption and of past research in the sample.

**Future customers defined as 18–28-year-olds who did not currently pay a water bill and are therefore listed separately. Desired quotas for other characteristics of this sample were more relaxed, with recruiters aiming for a mix of people.

'Vulnerable' and underrepresented sample – 20		Quotas (Desired)	Quotas (Achieved)
Sample criteria	All to be water bill payers		
Gender	Male	Min. 8	6
	Female	Min. 8	14
Age	18-24	Min. 3	2
	25-34	Min. 3	2
	35-44	Min. 3	4
	45-54	Min. 3	2
	55-64	Min. 3	7
	65+	Min. 3	3
Ethnicity	White	Min. 8	15
	Asian or Asian British	Min. 2	3
	Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British	Min. 2	2
	Mixed or Multiple or other Ethnic Groups	Min. 1	0
PSR status	Receives PSR	Min. 5	4
	Eligible but unaware of PSR	Min. 5	5
Low income	Financially vulnerable (Household income less than living wage (£23,400) or fits other indicators)	Min. 5	16
Disabilities	Mental health disability	Min. 3	6
	Physical disability	Min. 3	9
	Sensory disability	Min. 3	1
	Cognitive disability	Min. 3	4
Digital exclusion	Low/no internet usage	Min. 2	2
Limited English Proficiency	Speaks English as a second language	Min. 2	3

Non-household sample - 20	Quotas (Desired)	Quotas (Achieved)

Sample criteria	All to be water bill payers, or at managerial level / responsible for utilities.	20	20
Business size	Micro / small businesses (1-49 employees)	15	16
	Medium businesses (50-249 employees)	5	4
Geography	Rural	Min. 3	2
	Urban/suburban	Min. 10	18
Sector	Manufacturing / Industry	5	3
	Retail / Hospitality / Education	5	8
	Professional services	5	4
	Public services	5	5
Water use	Water use solely in domestic/consumer setting, e.g. kitchens, bathrooms	10	11
	Water use in domestic and non-domestic setting, e.g. industrial processes, manufacturing	10	9
Consumption	Low consumption (Annual water spend <£1,000)	Min. 6	6
	Medium consumption (Annual water spend £1,001-£3,000)	Min. 6	6
	High consumption (Annual water spend £3,001+)	Min. 6	8
Awareness of water retailers	Aware of retail competition – some to have switched retailer	15	10
	Unaware of retail competition	5	10

* Some quotas relaxed and listed as "Min." as quotas were relaxed

3. Research process

The Citizen Panel took a deliberative approach and involved a combination of in-person and online events, and activities on an online platform. Data from the panel was supplemented by depth interviews with:

- Non-household organisations, focused on gaining an understanding of their business context, and organisational views on accountability and research practice.
- Consumers who need extra help, engaged with a more accessible, abridged format, covering key research questions and stimulus more relevant to people in diverse vulnerable circumstances.

The research activities conducted are summarised in the table below:

Sample	Activity	Focus
Citizen Panel: household customers & future customers from across England and Wales (70)	Participant onboarding to online research platform and pre-task	Introduction to online platform, attitudinal questions relating to views on climate change and the water industry.
	Webinar: 2-hrs, online	Introduction to the water industry and the research project, including presentation from CCW representatives.
	At-home task	Recap and review of webinar information. Gauge views on different examples of research materials.
	Event 1: 3-hrs, F2F (Online for incidents group)	Explore key services and plans consumers would like to influence, deliberation and formation of principles for best practice in water company research. Consumer feedback on ideal scope, method and outcomes for research.
	At-home task	Reflection on research and engagement practice and participant-generated principles. Introduction to accountability topic.
	Young and future customer additional online event: 1.5 hrs	Additional time with young and future customers (from Citizen Panel), to hear generational perspectives on engagement practice and support them to understand the accountability topic.
	Event 2: 2-hrs, online	Gain consumer insight into 'how should consumers be involved in holding companies to account?' Support consumers to develop principles for holding companies to account.
	At-home task	Reflection on accountability – method and principles. Feedback on research experience.
Consumers who need extra help (20)	Depths in-person (or online)	Explore key services and plans consumers would like to influence, deliberation and

	x 1.5 hrs	formation of principles for best practice in water company research. Consumer feedback on ideal scope, method and outcomes for research.
Non-household customers (NHH, 20)	Online depths x 1 hr	Gain consumer insight into 'how should consumers be involved in holding companies to account?' Support consumers to develop principles for holding companies to account.

4. Method notes

Throughout the reports there are references to method notes, which can be found in these appendices. Method notes are used to help the reader understand the deliberative process, the learning journey participants undertook and to give context to the findings.

Method note 1: Research and Engagement: The principles for research and engagement have been built on participant-generated data from group discussions. The data was synthesised by Blue Marble and then reviewed by participants on the online platform. Consumers were satisfied with the emerging principles, finding them comprehensive and representative of their views.

This chapter gives a brief overview of what consumers meant by them and why they were important to them, with practitioner reflections on engagement practice. To avoid repetition, further detail of the discussions which fed into these is in Chapter 7.

Method note 2: Research and Engagement: During the webinar and Event 1, consumers were shown stimuli giving examples of activities and services their company undertakes day to day – referred to as 'Everyday services'. They were given a high-level explanation of the Price Review process and shown examples of topics related to 'Business Planning'. Their priorities were discussed in Event 1 and further reflected on via the online platform.

Everyday services

Water company services include		Wastewater company services include	
🚰	Treating, testing & delivering fresh drinking water to your home	🚽	Collecting wastewater from homes
	Fixing burst pipes	🏭	Extracting resources from sewage
🏠	Connecting new homes to the network		Treating & cleaning sewage before it is released into the environment
📄	Billing, payments and support for customers		Maintaining, improving and expanding drains and sewers incl. fighting fatbergs
🔧	Maintaining & upgrading the network	🏠	Helping reduce pollution and flood risk from rainwater
💧	Supporting customers to use less water, incl. education and water meters		Customer education e.g. flushing habits
	Improving biodiversity		

👤 Responding to customers who make contact

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Method note 3: Research and Engagement:

To explore the following research questions, we needed to bring a range of 'everyday services' and 'business planning' decisions to life. However, within the constraints of the research, we could not immerse the participants in each of the topics. Therefore, we developed stimuli covering 12 scenarios where water company staff were making a decision and wanted to gain public insight (see example scenario). These covered both information about the service / plan, and choices about the level of information the participants would want to receive from the company – low, medium or high levels of information – to be able to reflect meaningfully on each scenario

Sanjay is underground, trying to tackle a fatberg that is blocking the sewer

Sewerage companies must keep the wastewater pipe network flowing well. Otherwise sewage could flood locally. Fatbergs happen when…

- **Fats, oils, and greases** (FOG) are poured down the kitchen sink
- They **mix with items that shouldn't be flushed**, e.g. wet wipes, nappies
- Over time, they clump together and form a **blockage**.

Later today heavy rains are expected, and his manager is looking at whether there's enough capacity in the sewer system to stop it overflowing. Sometimes the water company has to release extra rainwater and sewage into the local river, to reduce the chance of it overflowing into peoples' homes and gardens.

What kind of information do water companies need to make decisions about this service?

- Number of blockages
- Maps of blockages to see if there are hotspots
- Their average response time to clear blockages
- Customer feedback/satisfaction
- Performance against targets for managing the number of times flooding from sewers happens: number of incidents per 10,000 sewer connections vs the Ofwat target
- Comparisons with performance of other companies
- Historical and forecast performance
- Advances in technology
- Customer information explaining what they should/should not flush down the toilet

How could customers be asked for their views on this?

- Via surveys, customer service feedback forms, group discussions and 1-2-1 interviews

What could happen after customers have had their say?

- Companies could develop information campaigns to raise awareness of what not to flush - prevention
- Companies could change the way they respond to blockages – speed and clean-up.
- Companies could invest in parts of the sewer network which have the most blockages to reduce the likelihood of them happening.

(see example below). To allow participants time to consider complex information, a table rotation was used, where each table looked at one or two everyday services scenarios, and one or two business planning scenarios.

While limiting use of industry terminology, broadly the 12 scenarios covered:

Everyday services: customer service; consumer education and communication about water efficiency; maintenance of the sewage network (incl. prevention of storm overflows); water treatment & quality; use of assets such as reservoirs for biodiversity and leisure; unplanned and planned interruptions.

Business planning topics: water resources management plan; vulnerability strategy; long-term strategy; drought management plan; affordability & acceptability testing; drainage and wastewater future strategy.

Participants also reflected on real examples of research materials from water company research, and answered questions related to engagement approach es on the online platform.

A potential research limitation is that participants will have been influenced by the number and range of topics we showed them.

Method note 4: Accountability: ahead of the moderated group discussions about the issue of accountability (and after we gauged their spontaneous views on accountability), consumers were given a brief introduction to the accountability topic, self-completion activities to reflect on accountability in their everyday lives, information about water industry regulation and some social media video clips from news outlets with content relating to negative company performance on leakage, sewage spills and financial mismanagement.

Method note 5: Accountability: these principles have been built on participant-generated data (generated in groups, synthesised and reviewed by participants on the online platform). They have then been developed using the findings in the scope, method and outcomes sub-chapters, as well as participant feedback on principles outlined in Ofwat's consultation on its rules under the Special Measures Bill[9].

The principles below have been prepared as a short digestible overview, with consumer and researcher views on how to put them into practice. To avoid repetition, the detailed findings related to each principle is in the Scope/Method/Outcome sub-chapters.

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[9] https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Policy-Consultation-Rules-on-Remuneration-and-Governance-2.pdf

Method note 6: Accountability: CCW and Ofwat wanted to gain insight into what consumers understood regarding 'accountability' before considering ideas and examples. We initially asked participants for their unstimulated views about what holding a company to account meant to them. We then asked about:

- How consumers might influence the decisions, services or performance of a company, in general and in the context of their water company, and how important this was to them.
- What consumers would want to hold companies to account on, and what they would want the outcomes of this to be.
- To ground their responses, we also prompted them to think about who they are accountable to in their lives, who is accountable to them, and for what.

Method note 7: Accountability: after seeking unstimulated views, we presented consumers with the proposal in the Water (Special Measures) Bill, that the public would have a new way to hold their water company accountable, which could take the format of a consumer group.

The 'consumer group' was not presented to them as a defined model, rather a neutral concept to explore how they thought consumer involvement in accountability could work, and what would give it the right power and ability to act. Consumers were briefed with examples of different factors to consider in terms of how a group could work (like the example below), to get them thinking about this.
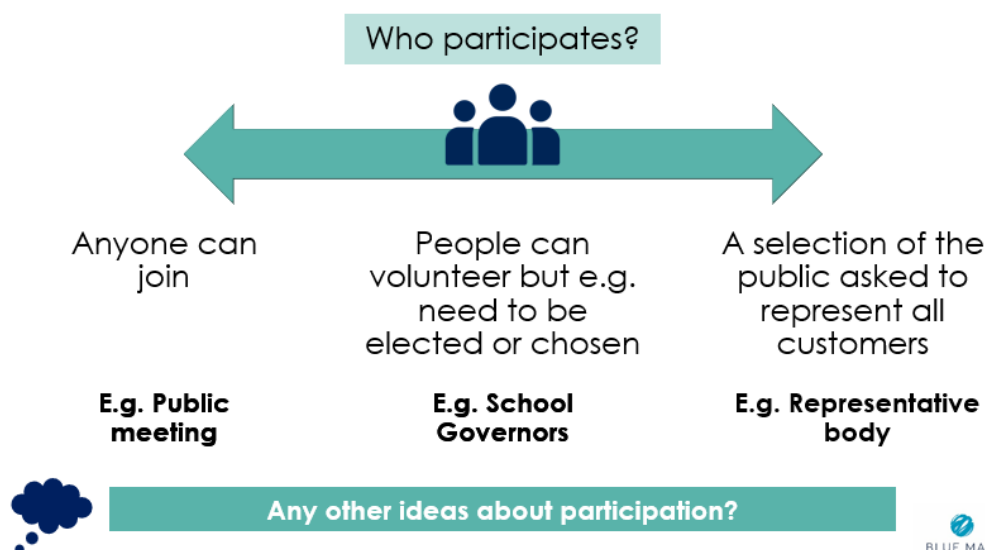
A follow up task on the online community asked consumers to think about what support/motivation they would need to take part in accountability mechanisms, and to think about this from the perspective of consumers who need extra help.

Method note 8: Accountability: we asked consumers what outcomes they would want to see from accountability mechanisms on the online community before they took part in the accountability discussion groups. During the event, we explored ideas about outcomes, and how consumers would like these to be disseminated.

Method note 9: Accountability: stimulus material we showed consumers during the deliberative events informed them that, as part of the Special Measures Bill, Ofwat will set rules to:

- Stop bonuses to senior staff when performance fails.
- Test if senior staff are 'fit and proper' for the role.
- Ensure consumers have a way to hold their water company to account.

This information may have informed their suggestions for punitive measures they wanted to see, to encourage companies to change their ways.

Method note 10: Accountability: during the additional future and young customer event, participants were shown stimulus relating to performance and management issues in the water sector. They were asked how they would like to hold companies to account (including the use of the consumer group) and what they would like to see happen as a result. The findings below are synthesised from young and future customer views expressed during this event, in combination with those expressed throughout their participation in the Citizen Panel process.

5. Analysis and reporting

After each live discussion, moderators saved recordings and logged key reflections against research objectives. Data from each platform activity has been downloaded and processed. For this research, data has been processed into an AI-assisted analysis tool, to support production of transcripts, data interrogation and production of quotes. The research team has used moderator reflections and transcripts to develop an analysis grid.

Participant-generated principles have been tested with participants on the online platform and used by the research team alongside analysis of the wider dataset to develop the principles.

It is important to note that the public generally has a low awareness of research and engagement practice. We therefore sought to explore participants' preferences for participating in research and engagement in a way which did not require any prior knowledge of research methodologies. Instead, we have drawn on any relevant previous experiences and listened to customers describe how they want to inform their water company's decisions and services.

6. Participant feedback

On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is terrible and 10 is excellent, respondents rated the research process an 8.3 on average.

In open ended questions, many respondents who had rated the research highly (at an 8 or above) expressed their interest in the research topic and explained that the sessions had been informative. Others praised moderators for their clarity and kindness, which allowed respondents to follow along with sessions easily and feel listened to.

"Excellent clear guidance, excellent staff with input from start to finish & even better face to face in the Leeds meeting."

Male, 35-44, Citizen Panel, England

"Everyone was very kind, treated us all as equals and we weren't made to feel stupid at any time and all our opinions were listened too."

Female, 35-44, Citizen Panel, Wales

"It was set out in a clear way, all questions have been simple and easy to answer. Everyone on the webinars were friendly and informative."

Female, 18-24, Citizen Panel, England

Those who did not rate the research as highly (at a 6 or below) mostly expressed struggling with the longitudinal nature of the research. These respondents were more likely to express dissatisfaction regarding the repetitive nature of some of the online activities.

A few respondents reported that, due to being neurodiverse, they had struggled with some of the longer form events, and digesting the information presented at these events. To improve this in future, respondents suggested simplifying the information presented as much as possible but in a way that avoids becoming patronising. Others suggested running the research over a shorter period.

"The fact that I'm neurodiverse did make it difficult for me to concentrate fully. It was lots of information all at once in points."

Female, 18-24, Citizen Panel, England

"Sometimes I felt it was hard to follow."

Male, 45-54, Citizen Panel, Wales

"It was okay, I learnt a lot but I think some of the seminars could've been broken down into more shorter ones."

Male, 18-24, Citizen Panel, England

Appendix C: additional findings

1. Accommodations and alternative engagement suggestions for consumers who need extra help

Accommodations suggested by the main Citizen Panel and consumers who need extra help, to better support consumers who need extra help, included:

- Facilitating communication for all, by offering hearing loops, translators, sign language interpreters, live captioning/transcripts and recording meetings.

- Providing materials in different formats when required, like braille, large print or easy-read

- Enabling consumer accompaniment by carers/family members who can guide and support them, building their confidence in taking part

- Making events online (so those that struggle to leave the house can participate), and providing sufficient support to help consumers use the relevant technology

- Where events are face to face, holding them in convenient locations, offering door to door transfers or covering travel costs for those that require it

- Offering asynchronous participation options that allow those that can't attend meetings to participate and share their feedback

Alternative engagement method options suggested included

- Offering shorter, or more flexible meetings

- Offering groups catered to, and focusing on specific consumer needs e.g. a sign language interpreted group (an idea specific to consumers who need extra help rather than the main consumer group)

- Conducting home visits

- Having customer representatives take part in the group, who are a point of contact for vulnerable customers (supporting them to share feedback in whichever way suits them best), and then advocate on their behalf

- The option to participate via voice note or video snippet for those struggling with their energy levels

- Phone calls or paper forms for those that are less comfortable going online

Appendix D: Advisory Group and Water UK

1. Advisory group and Water UK

An Advisory Group was set up to give input during the design phase and on emerging findings.

This group comprised professionals, most of whom had regulated sector experience - with specialisms in either consumer / public research and engagement practice, and/or accountability / democracy relating to customers and public services, and /or consumer (including non-household) consumer advocacy.

Design input influenced some of the research activities and stimuli. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Accountability scope: being clear with participants about scope i.e. that this research concerned the 'consumer' aspect of the Special Measures Bill; similarly that a separate independent commission was looking into the future role of regulators. This affected the stimulus.
- Accountability research design:
  - to support participants to connect with the emotional aspects of accountability. This was built into the discussion guide and online tasks.
  - to include media headlines and address failures up front. This affected the stimulus for workshops and online tasks.
  - to give participants examples of accountability from other sectors and parts of society. This was build into the stimulus.
  - key facets of a consumer group/panel to explore with participants. These were built into the stimulus and discussion guide.
- Research & engagement design: to use real examples of past research stimulus.

Input on the emerging findings has been used to influence some of the framing of the principles, 'reflections for practice' on the principles, and conclusions. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Report context: being clear about when research took place.
- Research & engagement reflections for practice: e.g. delivering 'honesty and transparency' via effective communications, when things go wrong, at community level, making use of the billing touchpoint and so forth.
- Accountability: reporting on how participants initially understood accountability.
- Accountability: reflections for practice and conclusions – to acknowledge the tension between informed and representative participants; to recognise the time and effort the will be needed to deliver a consumer group; to make use of public interest 'when things go wrong'; to learn from 'Your Water Your Say' sessions.

Meeting overviews which capture key points have been compiled so as to not directly refer to who was speaking, to support open discussion.

Additionally, emerging findings were shared with Water UK (the trade association for the water industry) to seek their view on whether the sector would find them clear and actionable.

2. Research Advisory Group: Terms of Reference

Overall aim of the group

CCW and Ofwat have commissioned Blue Marble to conduct research with consumers on 'better outcomes and accountability'. To explore:

- How to support effective consumer participation, to influence everyday water company services and future plans
- How consumers want to hold water companies to account

This research will help inform practice in the water sector and Ofwat's policy formation in response to the Special Measures Bill.

CCW and Ofwat recognise the importance of bringing the ideas and views of outside experts into the research. This is to ensure the research and ultimate outputs are not constrained by the specialisms and topic knowledge of the commissioning organisations or appointed research agency (Blue Marble Research).

Blue Marble are assembling an Advisory Group, to give guidance on research topics that we will explore with participants and ensure practical utility of outputs through external expertise.

Role of the Advisory Group

The role of the Group is to provide advice and external perspectives to the research.

Members are asked to:

- Provide thoughts, suggestions and recommendations based on expertise from different sectors and roles (see below).
- Bring diverse views and perspectives to advocate for the interests of English and Welsh consumers.
- Be briefed about the research process and offer input on the research topics at the design phase, to support the development of content for the research.
- Discuss emerging findings, so that the outputs both represent consumer interests and can be used in practice.

Membership criteria & meetings

The Group will be comprised of approximately 6 members. Members will consist of a range of individuals who bring a rich mix of experiences and perspectives, across public research/engagement practice, accountability & democracy, and consumer advocacy. Some, but not all members, have experience of the water sector.

Members have registered interest on a voluntary basis, with a charitable donation to be made on their behalf.

Members are asked to commit to input in November 2024 and February 2025, primarily via two online workshops and email correspondence.

Effort will be made to find dates when all members can attend meetings, or to support members to input via a follow-up call or email input.

Transparency, reporting and feedback

The members will offer feedback and suggestions, focusing on solutions where problems have been identified.

A summary of key discussion points and recommendations will be written up and circulated to the members.

Notes from meetings and correspondence, will be used by Blue Marble Research to help steer design, and the production of the research report and outputs.

The organisations/roles (and if agreed, names), of stakeholders will be published in an appendix to the main customer research report and outputs. However, opinions will not be quoted or directly attributed to individuals, to support open discussion.

Code of conduct

The Members should represent a range of different perspectives and be committed to the following principles.

- To observe and uphold good meeting etiquette and act respectively towards others.

- To agree not to share any sensitive information obtained without written consent in any way.

- Declare any conflict of interests which may affect your input or contributions to involvement discussions.

3. Research Advisory Group: meeting note November 2025

Attendees (alphabetical order)

Amelie Treppass: Project Lead, Blue Marble

Bec Aeddi: Project Support, Blue Marble

Brian West: Research and Insights Lead, Institute of Customer Service

Emma Partridge: Project Advisor, Blue Marble

Ian Bates: Policy and Representation Manager, East Midlands Chamber

Jon Hannah: Utilities Partnership Account Manager, Scope

Leslie Sopp: Independent Research and Insight Expert

Liz Cotton: Liz Research and Insight Manager, CCW

Lucy Bush: Participation expert, Demos (on maternity leave)

Michael Barnes: Policy Manager, CCW

Sian Lewis: Principal, Customer Research, Ofwat

Zoe Coombs: Customer Research team, Ofwat

Apologies from: Helen Charlton, Independent Consumer Advocate (notes from follow up meeting included in this note)

Timing	Agenda	Duration
11:00	Welcome and introductions	5 mins
	Introduction to the research	5 mins
11:15	Accountability	40 mins
11:55	**Comfort break**	5 mins
12:00	Research & Engagement practice	25 mins
12:25	AOB and Wrap-up	5 – 10 mins
		90 mins

Agenda and introduction

Blue Marble thanked all for taking part and gave a briefing covering the agenda, noting that accountability would be prioritised for discussion. Blue Marble has not previously discussed this with consumers and given the current context of lowered trust in water companies, they aim to ensure suitable topic content that participants will be able to engage with.

A request for a Terms of Reference had been made. Blue Marble checked interest in this from the Group. Three attendees indicating interest via show of hands.

Project background and objectives

The research context was outlined, in terms of water and sewerage consumer research and engagement practice and the Water (Special Measures) Bill. In terms of the Bill and accountability, the focus of the research is on 'ensuring greater customer representation in decision-making':

"In setting rules regarding ensuring greater customer representation in decision-making, the government expects Ofwat to work with the Consumer Council for Water to develop the rules to ensure optimal outcomes for customers. This may include a requirement for companies to establish or maintain enhanced consumer committees or panels, where this is not already in place."

"For the first time in history, customers will have the power to summon board members and hold water executives to account through new customer panels with teeth." Steve Reed MP.

Research objectives are:

To inform effective consumer participation, to influence water company services and plans:

- What are the principles for consumer engagement for everyday services?
- What are the principles for consumer engagement for business plan activities?

To inform effective consumer accountability processes in relation to their water company

- What are the principles for holding companies to account?
- What models do consumers think could support these?

Research process

The multi-stage consumer research process was outlined, with research and engagement topics to be covered ahead of Christmas, and the accountability topics in the new year.

Discussion notes

These have been grouped by area of discussion, to support action and consolidate themes across the group meeting and one-to-one meeting.

Remit of the Advisory Group

- Desire for clarity over role of Advisory Group and a Terms of Reference
- Concern over 'light touch' role of Advisory Group
- Desire for clarity that this is consumer research, and the Advisory Group are a steering group, not providing stakeholder evidence
  - Otherwise risk criticism of which stakeholders have been involved
- No overlapping remit with Independent Commission on the Water Sector Regulatory System

Remit of the research

- Need to manage participant expectations regarding accountability topics like fines and criminal charges, and which parts of the Bill are being focussed on i.e. customer representation in decision-making
- Need to be clear with participants that this is consumer research in relation to water company practice – not reviewing role of sector regulators (Government Commission underway)
- Importance of meaningful outcomes that will be used in practice

- Concern that where water companies have shown extensive business plan consumer research to date, this has had limited impact on regulatory decisions

- Suggestion to consult with John Cunliffe MP regarding research alignment and the independent commission. Research should focus on consumer accountability whilst noting any relevant findings for the Commission re. regulator

General advice about the research design and recruitment

- Need for participants to engage with complex concepts. Need to address information asymmetry; avoid overly technical language; make information straightforward
- Noted that we are seeking some participants with prior research experience
- Need for participants to have a range of experiences with water companies – noted that we are having a group with experience of incidents
- Challenge of preventing discussions being overwhelmed by individual/ personal service issues
- Importance of accessibility for disabled people
- Different definitions of vulnerability across companies
- Value of comparing different suppliers' performance; provide examples of good and bad performance
- Ensure representative participation
- Utilise examples from PR24 research

Accountability

- Importance of specifying research focus to participants re. accountability – focus on consumer role
  - However, provide high level explanation of current regulatory roles / accountability measures – give some of the context of Ofwat / Environment Agency role, and problems regarding EA
- Begin with open questions about implementing accountability; Consider starting with outcome-focused questions before moving to process
- Support participants to first connect to emotional aspects of accountability, to support their consideration of what a good process/outcome would be:
  - Begin at emotional level – e.g. 'How does it feel when someone is taking responsibility/ being accountable'?
  - Importance of understanding personal experiences of being "listened to or considered" – good/bad customer service experience
  - Agreement on importance of establishing positive sense of accountability before relating to broader processes
  - Ask when they feel a company has demonstrated accountability to them – what did that look like?

- Suggestion to present wider stakeholder views and media headlines as context; address failures upfront
  - Vs. need a 'dispassionate' approach, to move beyond knee-jerk responses to sector issues / personal issues of concern

- Ask participants what can be improved, to support them to move beyond individual services issues

- Re. Scope of accountability: useful to get participants to think about whether it's for everyday issues or business plan level topics

- Providing spectrum of accountability options for consideration; accountability is an alien concept, would need to give them ideas/concepts to consider
  - Start with comparative examples from other sectors

- In discussing consumer committees/panels as a model for accountability, explore with participants:

  - How to democratise the process
  - How can it be independent from water companies i.e. who appoints the people to the panel
  - Should it be a fixed-term, non-renewable appointment
  - Should there be a different panel for everyday issues and business plan topics
  - How does the consumer panel interact with Ofwat and CCW?
  - Do you need expertise to take part in a consumer panel?
  - What role, if any, could an experts play in holding companies accountable?
  - Role of transparency in supporting accountability
  - Where does the power lie in the accountability structure

- Recommendations for involving specific speakers:
  - Office of Steve Reed
  - Water company CEO
  - Politician
  - Activist
  - Non-executive director

- Additional Models referenced
  - International examples e.g. Australia, French citizen assemblies
  - Local Gov; Local examples: Tideway Tunnel engagement; Portsmouth/Southampton reservoir project
  - Scotland versus English/Welsh water company models
  - Patient panels in hospitals
  - School governors
  - Housing ombudsman, House sector resident engagement

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- o Public forums – e.g. previously 'Your Water Your Say', or Council 'town hall' style events
- o Consumer panels of other regulatory bodies: FCA, Ofcom, CAA
- o What CCG model was in PR24

Research and engagement practice

- That participants would need to understand what Ofwat and other regulators 'prescribe' versus water company decisions that customers can influence
  - o Help participants understand complex decision-making by putting themselves in role of non-executives

Digital and AI theme:

- Recognition of social media as direct accountability channel
- Impact of celebrity complaints noted as pivotal
- Discussion of AI considerations:
  - o Importance of customers understanding AI as third party
  - o Concern about AI potentially using customer data for other purposes

General non-household advice:

- Large businesses noted to have direct lines of communication to water companies – less likely to want to take part in research or accountability processes
- Medium-sized businesses identified as challenging to engage
- Need to highlight clear benefits for business participation
- Non-household interest in service disruption issues and ease of contact during incidents

4. Research Advisory Group: meeting note March 2025

Attendees (alphabetical order)

Amelie Treppass: Project Lead, Blue Marble

Evie Fleck: Project Manager, Blue Marble

Hannah Bradley: Head of Evidence and Insight, CCW

Helen Charlton, Independent Consumer Advocate

Ian Bates: Policy and Representation Manager, East Midlands Chamber (part attendance)

John Hanna: Utilities Partnership Account Manager, Scope

Leslie Sopp: Independent Research and Insight Expert

Lindsey Kearton: Senior Policy Researcher, Citizens Advice

Lucy Bush: Director of Research and Participation, Demos

Michael Barnes: Policy Manager, CCW

Sian Lewis: Principal, Customer Research, Ofwat

Apologies from: Brian West: Research and Insights Lead, Institute of Customer Service; Liz Cotton: Research and Insight Manager, CCW

Agenda

Timing	Agenda	Duration
10:00	Welcome and recap	10 mins
10:10	Effective research & engagement	40 mins
10:50	**Comfort break**	10 mins
11:00	Accountability	50 mins
11:50	AOB and wrap-up	5 – 10 mins

Welcome and recap

A brief overview of agenda and attendees was given, with a recap on the research approach and objectives.

One member declared having a personal contact with a Water Company Director, but attendees were happy to proceed without assuming a conflict of interest.

Advisory Group members were advised that notes would be taken, in order to produce a meeting note. Comments would not be attributed to individuals. However, it is proposed that the meeting notes and a record of attendees will be referred to in the appendices of the research report. Blue Marble to liaise over any concerns via email.

A pre-read covering the draft key findings and draft principles emerging from the research analysis had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Objectives of Meeting 2 were to seek advisory group input on: 1) content and clarity 2) reflections for practice 3) conclusions.

Effective research & engagement

Advisory group members commented that in general, the pre-read demonstrated interesting draft findings, and that the principles chimed with their experiences and insights from wider research and consumer engagement.

In terms of the key findings, the discussion covered:

- Ensuring accountability insight is prominent and easy to find for readers (BM indicated 2 separate reports, with key findings/principles and detailed analysis being prepared). Recommendation that reports cross-reference each other, so readers do not find them difficult to reconcile.

- Questions over whether additional detail and findings sit outside the principles; whether any differences between sub-audiences e.g. consumers in vulnerable circumstances would be detailed.

- That the report should note that research took place before public received company communications about latest price increases.

- Comment that the findings reference 'most people willing to participate' – what can we say about those who are not.

In terms of principles and putting them into practice:

Honesty and transparency:

- That during PR24, company websites were patchy and variable as to how they demonstrated the research and engagement undertaken and its use.

- Suggestion this principle could be delivered by encouraging companies to be more open with their communications, creating an environment where consumers go to company websites, raising engagement and moving beyond consumers just engaging with media headlines.

- Comment that people want honesty and transparency when things are going wrong, or they feel they are being covered up – and would be happy to forget about water companies otherwise.

- That in a context where bills are due to rise further and continued media interest, companies will need to deliver on this principle by communicating why bills have increased, where money is being spent and whether it is making a difference.

- Clear value in staff engaging at community level e.g. community events.

- That a main touchpoint that companies have with their customers is around billing – this could be used in a more productive way.

Informed but not overwhelmed, and accessibility:

- There is a potential tension with these two principles – in terms of accessibility and providing people with different avenues to participate effectively and value of input on complex issues. Companies have put a lot of effort into reaching different audiences but trying to simplify approaches and issues can reduce the value of input. The industry is grappling with how to engage on both BAU and business planning, where both have long term implications for infrastructure and investment.

- Information is less overwhelming if it answers a question that is relevant/interesting to the participants. Everything needs to be reframed in this way. There is work to be done around making business planning information link back to impact on consumers.

- Recognition of consumer appetite for KPI information and 'you said, we did' style information. Members recognise consumer concern that companies are not disseminating information about what is going wrong. View that companies need to communicate track record and targets.

Motivating & acted on:

- Transparency and honesty about how bills are decided on is very difficult. Consider referencing regulators (Ofwat, Dwi, EA etc.) have responsibilities on this front, and need to support clarity over 'what happens at the end' and what is done with engagement/insight, to improve consumer trust.

- Agreement that financial incentives are key. Consider that some members of the public may welcome or enjoy the role of speaking directly to water company representatives.

- Companies need to get the right processes in place and feedback loops to reflect on consumer contributions and make sure that they are meaningful.

- Example given of energy network customer panel: participants do not get paid for contributions, they get points, but people take part if they are interested in the dialogue – it's an informed participant panel.

Accountability

Key findings

- Suggestion to include how participants understood accountability upfront.

- Surprised to see issues re. pollution/sewage are not coming out more strongly in the key findings.

- Suggestion that research needs to recognise that water companies have low salience for the general public, aside from last few years with issues in the media. That this and bills will affect views on accountability.

- Query whether participants raised affordability of bills as an accountability issue.

- Query over responsibility of regulators to hold companies to account versus what role the public can have. Query whether CCW or regulators should have a greater role.

- Query whether the research took a baseline re. public understanding of what regulators do.

- View that current regulatory architecture is complex. That PR19 customer representatives could not cope with time/detail/operational detail.

- Comment that the interaction of any new accountability group with regulators and other bodies would be very complex.

- Comment that a new mechanism would need a lot of resource to make it meaningful. There are clear challenges as to how to recruit and maintain people taking part; how will things work in reality. View that parties to this should not underestimate the challenge of putting this into practice.

In terms of principles and putting them into practice:

- Suggestion that the report indicates that eliciting views on current regulators was not in the research scope.

- Question as to whether participants had been asked whether they would join a new accountability mechanism.

- Reference to PR24 'Your Water Your Say' sessions – which companies put strong effort into setting up. View that they did not draw a wide range of views, and the management of the sessions meant that mostly people angry about sewage were heard. View that follow through did not really happen, and companies need to put resources and commitment in here. The process needs to be meaningful end to end, and manageable. E.g. company ran events in public libraries to try and reach out to others, and nobody attended. Companies need to assess what is realistic, affordable, manageable.

- Suggestion that we could go back to our participants for future research or to update them.

- Query whether the role of company boards in accountability has been raised. For example, in the financial services sector, in relation to new consumer duty, there is a board report from whole board, not just from a customer focused board member.

- Re. board visibility: companies that work well will have board connectivity with different groups. Water companies should have CEO/senior directors heading out to connect with customers directly affected by issues. Having a presence makes a difference in building trust.

- View that public engagement in water company issues increases when there are specific plans affecting an area e.g. roadworks, or when something goes wrong. Companies need to maximise those engagement opportunities – that's when people need an open invite to turn up.

- View that consumers have low awareness of what challenge groups like CCG's/ICG's have been doing.

- Suggestion that members of the public who are more active in community issues, may be more likely to take part in a new accountability mechanism, than busy members of the general public.

- Suggestion that relationship between council/councillor and water company could be leveraged – as these stakeholders are closer to local issues.

- Challenge to the idea of whether a new accountability mechanism should include people 'representative' of public demographics. Recognition of huge time and effort companies have put into doing research with representative samples, but questions whether this is what is needed here. Question whether representative will equate with effective. Suggestion to involve people who can make a meaningful contribution, without letting it by hijacked by interest groups.

- Suggestion that part of the expert support could be done in a similar way to how a judge guides a jury.

- Suggestion that a one-size fits all group may not be possible. Suggestion that different tiers of complexity and audience involvement may be needed. E.g. divide up performance standards, pricing. View that currently CCG's try to cover too many issues.

Appendix E: Research materials

1. Process plan

Context

Research objectives:

Overall, this research seeks to understand:

1. How can consumer research and engagement be meaningful and effective in delivering high quality water and sewerage services?

   o What are the principles for consumer engagement for everyday services?

   o What are the principles for consumer engagement for business plan activities?

2. How should consumers be involved in holding companies to account?

   o What are the principles for holding companies to account?

   o What models do consumers think could support these?

To deliver relevant insight, research questions are:

Meaningful & effective consumer participation	
Scope	• What are the key areas/services that consumers want to influence decisions on? (BAU/BP Future investment/ when something goes wrong / anything else) • Which services and topics consumers feel their engagement is most important for?

Method	• At a 'principles' level, which research and engagement approaches and methods do consumers think will best support them to participate in decision making with water companies?
	
	    o Which approaches work best for different consumer audiences?
	
	    o What do consumers want/need to know about these topics to form their views?
	
	    o How to make information accessible / fit for purpose?
	
	    o What alternatives to direct engagement with consumers themselves are acceptable to consumers? When is indirect engagement appropriate e.g. lower importance, lower interest or highly complex topics that consumers do not feel they can give appropriate feedback on? And who/what organisations might be appropriate and trusted to represent their views?

Outcomes of participation	• How should companies and regulators should show that consumer voices are heard and acted upon?

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Consumer accountability: how do consumers want to hold water companies to account?	

Scope	• What does 'holding companies to account' for the delivery of everyday services mean to consumers?
	    o How important is this to consumers and why?
	• What do consumers want to hold water companies to account on and why?
	    o Unstimulated and stimulated: Priority topics / day-to-day services?
	    o Overall performance?

Method	• At a 'principles' level, what approach would work best to enable different audiences to hold companies to account?
	    o Which audiences should participate? Should all consumers, in principle, have the chance to do this?
	    o Which approaches would work for different audiences and topics?
	    o What do consumers need to know to hold water companies accountable effectively? How to make this information accessible?
	    o Customer views on example accountability models (explored through neutral concept of a consumer group)
	    o Customer views on non-direct accountability models: who do consumers trust to hold companies accountable if it's not consumers directly and how they think consumers would want to be kept updated?

Outcomes of accountability	• What kind of outcomes do customers want from holding companies to account and how could this be demonstrated to them • How should accountability be measurable and transparent for consumers?

In order for customers to have an informed view on these topics, **we need to communicate:**

What do customers need to know?	This should include:
Introduction to water industry and services	o Overview of water cycle, water companies in England & Wales o Introduction to monopoly regulation and price review / business planning o (Long-term challenges / industry context – v. high level, re. explaining business planning and that water companies are making investment choices which will affect customers in future, future bills etc: climate, growing population, ageing infrastructure) o Introduction to water and sewerage bills – high level

	o What water and sewage companies do
	   o Overview of water company services, incl. topics for BAU services and Business Plans
	   o Priority topics from previous consumer research
	
	   o Indication of topics where consumer insights are more likely to impact service quality and future planning
	
	   o Indication of which topics are likely to be more complex

Engagement and research approaches	o Current consumer research practice: context of water sector approach to consumer insight from past price reviews incl. why this is being reviewed now i.e. PR24 about to start, increased bills, performance issues o Trends in research and engagement best practice o PR24 and BAU examples for different audiences, o Exemplifying how companies and the regulator currently demonstrate they are using customer insight
Accountability	o Policy / political / media context to the research – explain why accountability is an issue currently o An overview of how accountability currently works in the water sector? o Which topics have been prevalent in terms of service and performance failures recently o Different definitions of consumer accountability o Different methods for consumer accountability and ways of measuring it, incl. non-direct options

At home task 1

Length	15 – 20 mins	Topic	Learning more about you
Format	Online community	**Objective/s**	Onboarding, baseline questions
Research question/s	What accountability means to customers, how important it is in the context of the delivery of everyday services Which topics they think they should have the most influence on (unstimulated) Which services and topics do customers think that with the right support, they can understand sufficiently in order to give their view on?		
Communicate	How to use online platform and Zoom Introduce objectives, purpose, client, Blue Marble etc. TBC very short intro to water sector		

Activities	Onboarding on to online platform and recap of confidentiality information/guidelines to taking part
	Check baseline attitudes: e.g. to climate change, to water company, to water sector
	Uniformed insight: what accountability means to them, how important it is for the delivery of everyday services, and which topics they think customers should have the most influence on. Initial views on outcomes from increased consumer accountability.
	Reading: short water sector introductory information

Online webinar

Length	90 minutes 19:00 - 20:30 Mon 2 Dec	Topic	Introduction to the water industry and the research project
Format	Zoom	Objective/s	Primarily the webinar is for information-giving and supporting participants to ask questions. Opportunity for some initial reflections and initial insight into which topics they think customers should have the most influence on.
Communicate		■	Overview of water cycle, water and sewerage companies in England & Wales, monopoly regulation
		■	Long-term challenges / industry context: climate, growing population, ageing infrastructure
		■	Introduction to water bills – high level
		■	Overview of water company services, incl. topics for BAU services and Business Plan
Activities		■	Introducing objectives, purpose and use of research
		■	Introducing CCW and Ofwat
		■	Introducing water industry & everyday services: key topics (story cards introduction)

	- Concept of business planning and price reviews, key topics (story cards introduction) - Q&A

At-home task 2

Length	15-20 mins	Topic	Recapping what you've learnt
Format	Online community	Objective/s	Consolidation and individual insight Initial insight into customer perspectives on priority topics
Research question/s	Did customers understand and retain the information they learned in the briefing webinar?		
Communicate	Key information via slides from webinar		
Activities	- Reviewing slide deck and answering multiple choice questions to consolidate information - Review examples of different PR24 and BAU materials and research examples against draft principles. Considering: Is the level of information appropriate? Is the information accessible? How hard/easy do they find it etc.		

Event 1: In-person deliberative event

Length	3 hours 18:00 – 21:00	Topic	Effective customer participation to influence water and sewerage companies' services and plans
Format	Zoom	Objective/s	Insight into how consumers want to influence services and plans Deliberation and formation of principles
Research question/s	Scope What are the key areas/services that consumers want to influence decisions on? (BAU/BP Future investment/ day to day services/ when something goes wrong / anything else) - What, if anything, triggers customers to want to influence in these areas? - What things do consumers feel it is less important for water companies to consult/engage with them on and why? (e.g. Low interest/relevance/complexity)		

	■ Which services and topics consumers feel their engagement is most important for them to give, and for companies to listen to? And within this, what do customers think they can sensibly give their views on in terms of more complex things? Method ■ At a 'principles' level, which research and engagement approaches and methods do consumers think will best support them to participate in decision making with water companies? Which approaches work best for different consumer audiences? ■ What do consumers want to know on these topics, in order to form a view? ■ How to make information accessible / fit for purpose so that consumers can understand it and form a view? ▪ Which things, if any, do consumers think would be ok for others to engage with the company on, in order to represent their views on them? Which third parties would be trusted to do, and why? Outcomes ■ How should companies, regulators and any other organisations seen as relevant by consumers show that consumer voices are heard and acted upon? Principles ■ What are the principles for consumer engagement for everyday services? What are the principles for consumer engagement for business plan activities?
Communicate	■ Different ways to find out customer views and feedback (methods) ■ Context of water company research landscape – why this is being reviewed now i.e. PR24 about to start ■ Trends in research and engagement best practice (in the industry and wider) ■ Range of complexity of topics explored through water industry research (BAU and BP), and the different levels of detail they can be examined at
Activities	■ Meet your group and warm-up (2 tables per event) ■ Information giving: ways in which companies involve customers in everyday services and business planning decisions currently Activity: everyday services ■ Importance exercise – explore customers' spontaneous priorities in groups ■ In groups: discussion of 'scope', 'method' and 'outcomes' using story card stimulus (real world examples) Create: a set of principles for engagement for everyday services

	Activity: business planning
	■ Importance exercise – explore customers' spontaneous priorities in groups
	■ In groups: discussion of 'scope', 'method' and 'outcomes' using story card stimulus (real world examples)
	■ Create: a set of principles about how engagement for business plan activities conducted by water companies should be done.

At home task 3

Length	15-20 minutes	Topic	Research and engagement practice Accountability
Format	Online community	Objective/s	Research & engagement: Support customers to reflect on draft principles in practice. Accountability • Information-giving: support consumers to explore key issues in media where there have been service and performance failures • Customer insight into ideas for accountability from their lives
Research question/s			■ How should companies and regulators show that consumer voices are heard What are the key areas/services that consumers want to influence decisions on? (BAU/BP Future investment/delivery of everyday services/ when something goes wrong / anything else)
			■ Which services and topics consumers feel their engagement is most important for? What should water companies be listening to their customers about? And what things do customers most have an opinion on/want to give an opinion on and why?
			■ Which services and topics do customers think that with the right support, they can understand sufficiently in order to give their view
			■ How should different customer groups be supported to give their views?
			■ What 'holding companies to account' means to customers and how important or not this is to them
			■ How customers think water companies are currently held accountable, and how, if at all, they would want this to change

Communicate	■ Background information to topic of accountability (definition of accountability, consumer accountability, competition and monopolies), key building blocks and challenges to holding companies accountable. ■ Water industry issues that are pushing consumer accountability up the agenda
Activities	■ Reflect on draft principles from event 1 ■ Preparation for Event 2 - accountability: media exploration of issues in water industry e.g. sewage, incidents, leaks, bill rises. Thinking of different models of accountability in their everyday lives. Generating priority topics they think companies should be held to account about. Exploration of their understanding of the current accountability system and what, if anything, abut it should be changed.

At home-task 4

Length	20 mins	**Topic**	Accountability
Format	Online community	**Objective/s**	Support participants to reflect on approaches and draft principles
Research question/s			Which approaches and methods do consumers think will best enable them to hold water companies to account? What support might they need to do this? Which approaches work best for different consumer audiences? What do consumers need to know in order to hold their company to account effectively? How, if at all, does this vary across different issues? How to make this information accessible / fit for purpose? At a principle level, what approach would work best to enable different audiences to hold companies to account?
Communicate			■ Synthesised principles from Event 2 ■ Ofwat's accountability principles
Activities			■ Further reflection on support consumers who need extra help might need to participate in groups ■ Review of principles for accountability summarised from across groups ■ Review of principles from Ofwat consultation ■ Research process feedback

2. Event 1 Discussion Guide

Moderator notes:

Overview	
Event	**Time**
Registration and light dinner catering	**17:15-18:00**
Welcome	**18:00-18:10**
Meet your group and warm-up (2 tables per event)	**18:10-18:20**
Information giving: customer participation	**18:20-18:35**
Activity: business planning	**18:35-19:30**
Comfort and refreshment break	**19:30-19:45**
Activity: creating principles for engagement for business planning	**19:45-20:00**
Activity: everyday services	**20:00-20:40**
Activity: creating principles for engagement for everyday services	**20:40-20:55**
Next steps: recap, briefing on at-home task	**20:55-21:00**

Discussion guide	
Task description	**_Materials_**
17:15 – 18:00 Registration and light dinner catering	
Set-up • Set up 2 tables, with enough chairs for **7** participants +1 BM . • Chair for client observer not at the table. • Tables should have table number sheet, pens, paper, highlighters and post its. • Set-up welcome desk, laptop with sign in list, name labels with table numbers, consent forms • Check that screen working • Check catering OK for the day: main sandwiches etc. should be available from 5:15/5:30; at 7:30 it should be coffee and biscuits etc. • Check where toilets etc. are to inform participants / emergency exit protocols etc. **Registration and refreshments** • BM staff to manage sign-in, name badge indicating table, consent forms • Indicate where toilets are and refreshments • At around 17.50 start encouraging respondents to sit down and say hi to each other at tables. 1 BM staff per table	• Name badges • Excel sign in sheet and table allocation • Pens • Post-its • Table number sheets • Voice recorders • Flip-chart paper • [Highlighters / sticky dots if you have some]
18:00 – 18:10 Welcome	
Plenary (led by lead facilitator): _see script in PowerPoint deck_ • Welcome • Introductions • Event objectives/agenda • House-keeping Client observer to briefly introduce themselves and welcome respondents and observers	
18:10 – 18:20 Meet your group and warm up	
Introductions (5 mins) **Moderators to sit at tables and introduce themselves** _[At the table] I'm going to be asking you various questions and encouraging you to discuss your views on various topics today._	

Please do take turns to speak, but you don't have to wait for me to point at you. However, I may interrupt to make sure everyone gets a turn, and to move us through the discussion questions.

We are also recording the discussion to help our analysis and reporting. This will be used in line with your consent with the recruiter. Your names won't be included in the report. Themes of the discussions we have will be shared with Ofwat and CCW but comments will not be attributed to an individual.

*****press record ******

Moderator to encourage respondents to give:

- Their names
- Who they live with at home
- What they like getting up to in their free time

Warm-up (5 mins)

And now thinking back to the webinar:

- Thinking back on the things your water company does – from what you remember - which of these topics or services would you say were a **particular priority** for you, and why?

[Only if time:

For those of you that have taken part in water company or other research before:

- Name something that made participating a **good or less good** experience]

18:20 – 18:35 Information giving: research practice

Plenary (led by lead facilitator): *see script in Powerpoint deck*

Lead facilitator to talk through:

- Why companies ask for customer views and feedback in general
- Why water companies ask for customer views and feedback i.e. recap regulation information from webinar

- Different ways to find out customer views and feedback (methods)
- How water companies' research and customer engagement has changed over time
- Ofwat's standards for high quality research
- Recent trends in research practice across sectors
- Explain 'level of detail/involvement' scale

18:35 – 19:30 business plan topics

Importance exercise (10 minutes)

Lead to screenshare and read out list of business plan topics to respondents

- Which topic do you think customers should have the most input in and why?
- What about if something **went wrong** with these business plan topics?
  - How, if at all, would the importance of this topic change?

Business planning 'world' exercise (40 mins – to cover 2 cards)

- Story cards
- Persona cards

Now we're going to talk through your views on the best way to conduct research with customers on water company's proposed business plans. This includes companies asking where and how much money customers think should be invested in different things.

The topics covered by water industry research can be complex, so we've drawn up different scenarios to help bring them, and the impact they have on customers, to life.

You may remember these from the webinar – we've added some ideas about the types of customers each topic might influence, possible research methods to explore them, and potential outcomes following customer research. These are just suggestions intended to get you thinking – not a full list.

We'll go through your thoughts on how companies should involve customers in 2-3 of these topics

Leeds

- *Table A to cover cards: 1 Anna, 2 Lucy*

- *Table B start with cards: 3 Dave, 4 Ato*

Birmingham

- *Table A to cover cards: 5 Reema, 6 Paulo*

- *Table B start with cards: 1 Anna, 3 Dave*

Deeside

- *Table A to cover cards: 5 Reema, 2 Lucy*

- *Table B start with cards: 4 Ato, 6 Paulo*

Bristol

- *Table A to cover cards: 1 Anna, 4 Ato*

- *Table B start with cards: 2 Lucy, 5 Reema*

Online group

- *Table A to cover cards: 3 Dave, 6 Paulo*

- *Table B start with cards: 4 Ato, 5 Reema*

Moderators to encourage respondents to get into pairs to familiarise themselves with the story card (reading both the front and back), and complete the worksheet related to that topic with their partner

Referring to the level of detail on the back of the card:

- What sort of things would you want to know about this topic to be able to give your opinion? It can be any or all of the things in the example here – or you might think of something else.

Encouraging respondents to feed back to the group in their pairs, and lead a group discussion related to their answers:

- What level of detail about the issue do customers want to know and give opinions about? And why?
  - Is it **less or low detail**, key changes to the service and what this means for customers?
  - Is it **medium level** of detail, things the company could do and how?

- - Is it **lots of detail**, including information and data about how the service works at the moment and what effect changes would have?

- Why do you want this level of detail?

- How could companies make information about this topic easier for customers to understand?

- What support would help them give an **informed view** on it?

- **[At what level and] how** would you want to be involved in decisions in this topic?

- **Introduce a persona card [if time]:** How, if at all, do your answers to these questions change when **considering this persona card?**

- **Building on their answers from the worksheet:** To what extent should the company prioritise what customers think vs what they think they should prioritise for this topic? Why?

- To what extent, if at all, would you **trust someone else (e.g. an organisation, company, group)** to represent your views on this topic? Why?
  - If so, which organisations would you trusted to do this and why?

If time, show respondents the 4 cards they didn't cover, ask them which topic they would want to feedback on the most, and then repeat the questions for this topic

Outcomes (5 mins)

- When water companies involve their customers in helping them plan their business, how much influence should their views have?
  - As a minimum, what should companies always do as a result of customer views?
  - Ideally, what should they do?

- How should companies **show** that consumer voices are heard and acted upon across business planning topics?

19:30 – 19:45 Comfort and refreshment break	
19:45 – 20:00 Creating principles for engagement for business planning services	
Thinking about everything we've discussed so far today: • What would be the **key guiding principles** you would give to water companies for how they should best involve customers in **shaping business plan** decisions? **Ask customers to jot down their ideas - as single words or short sentences - on post its and then take turn to share their ideas and their reasoning.** **Moderator to put key words / ideas on flip-chart as they speak.** **Then ask participants to finish activity by ticking their top 3 – either standing up for flip chart, or the paper being passed around.**	• Flip chart paper • Post-its
20:00 – 20:40 Everyday services topics	
Importance exercise (10 minutes) *Lead to screenshare and read out list of everyday services topics to respondents* • Which topic would you want to **influence the most/least** and why? • What about if something **went wrong** with these everyday services? o How, if at all, would the importance of this topic change? *Now we're going to talk through your views on the best ways water companies should do research with customers in regards to the way they deliver everyday services:* **Everyday services 'world' exercise (30 mins – to cover 2 cards)**	

Moderator to explain that the table will be conducting the same exercise as before with the everyday services topics they were introduced to at the webinar

Each table to cover 2 service cards. Spend around 15 mins on each card .

Leeds

- *Table A to cover cards: Rav, Aaliyah*
- *Table B start with cards: Sanjay, Chris*

Birmingham

- *Table A to cover cards: Emma, Gary*
- *Table B start with cards: Rav, Sanjay*

Deeside

- *Table A to cover cards: Emma, Aaliyah*
- *Table B start with cards: Chris, Gary*

Bristol

- *Table A to cover cards: Rav, Chris*
- *Table B start with cards: Aaliyah, Emma*

Online group

- *Table A to cover cards: Sanjay, Gary*
- *Table B start with cards: Chris, Emma*

Moderators to encourage respondents to get into pairs to familiarise themselves with the story card (reading both the front and back), and complete the worksheet related to that topic with their partner

Referring to the level of detail on the back of the card:

- What sort of things would you want to know about this topic to be able to give your opinion? It can be any or all of the things in the example here – or you might think of something else.

Encouraging respondents to feed back to the group in their pairs, and lead a group discussion related to their answers:

- What sort of things would you want to know about this topic to be able to give your opinion?
- What level of detail about the issue do customers want to know and give opinions about?
    - Is it **low / limited detail**, key changes to the service and what this means for customers?
    - Is it **medium level** of detail, things the company could do and how?
    - Is it **lots of detail**, including information and data about how the service works at the moment and what effect changes would have?

- Why do you want this level of detail?

- How could companies make information about this topic easier for customers to understand?

- What support would help them give an **informed view** on it?

- **How** would you want to be involved decisions in this topic?

- **Introduce a persona card [if time]:** How, if at all, do your answers to these questions change when **considering this persona card?**

- **Building on their answers from the worksheet:** To what extent should the company prioritise what customers think vs what they think they should prioritise for this topic? Why?

- To what extent, if at all, would you **trust a third party** to represent your views on this topic? Why?
    - If so, which organisations would you trust to do this and why?

If time, show respondents the 4 cards they didn't cover, ask them which topic they would want to feedback on the most, and then repeat the questions for this topic

Outcomes (5 mins)

- How should companies show that **consumer voices are heard and acted upon** – across everyday services?

- How would you like these outcomes to be **communicated** with customers and why?

20:40 – 20:55 Creating principles for engagement for everyday services

- What would be the **key guiding principles** you would give to water companies for how they should best get their customers **involved in shaping everyday services**?

Ask customers to jot down their ideas – as single words or short sentences on post its and then share their ideas and their reasoning - especially why they may be different ideas from customer involvement in business planning not.

Moderator to put key words / ideas on flip-chart and ask participants to finish activity by putting green dots on or ticking their top 3.

20:55 – 21:00 Next steps: Recap, briefing on at-home task

Lead facilitator to **thank** respondents for coming, and **brief** on the remaining steps of the research process, when the at-home task will be uploaded, and what it involves.

3. Event 2 Discussion Guide

Event details:

- 18:30 – 20:30 on Mon 13th Jan and Thurs 16th Jan
    - 13 Jan: Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol
    - 16 Jan: Incidents group, North Wales
- Zoom
- Topic: accountability

Overview	
Event	**Time**
Respondents encouraged to join meeting and test their tech	**18:15 - 18:30**
Welcome, introduction to Special Measures Bill, accountability and regulation	**18: 30**
Discussion group: meet your group and warm up	**18:45 – 19:10**
Plenary: introduction to proposal for water sector accountability and things to consider	**19:10 – 19:20**
BREAK	**19:20 – 19:30**
Discussion group:	**19:30 - 20:10**
Principles	**20:10-20:25**
Next steps and recap	**20:25-20:30**

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Discussion guide	
Task description	***Materials***
18:15 – Respondents encouraged to join and test their tech	
Ahead of call: • Polls set up • Breakout groups assigned and tested • Screen sharing tested • BM tick attendees off against attendance Excel • Recruiters on call to help with any tech issues • Encourage respondents to change their Zoom names to first name, surname e.g. Joe, B. **PRESS RECORD TO CLOUD**	Excel sign in sheet
18:30 – 18:45 Plenary	
Welcome (led by lead facilitator): - ***5 mins*** • Welcome • Introductions • Event objectives/agenda • House-keeping (recap Zoom etiquette) Water Special Measures Bill – 5 mins Accountability & regulation – 5 mins	Running slides
18:45 – 19:10 Meet your group and warm up (break out rooms)	
Moderators to introduce themselves *Hello, my name is X and I'll be hosting this first discussion group – you'll be back in your original groups later on this evening.* *Please do take turns to speak, but you don't have to wait for me to point at you. However, I may interrupt to make sure everyone gets a turn, and to move us through the discussion questions.*	Running slides

*****press record ******

Moderator to encourage respondents to share with their breakout group:

Initial reflections – 10 mins

You may remember, on the platform we asked you to think about who you are accountable to, and who is accountable to you in your life. Please tell us your name and what you thought of.

What are your initial reactions to there being new rules for the public to be able to hold their water company to account?

(Customers being able to influence and challenge decisions, performance, services and when something goes wrong?)

- *How important is this to you? When is it important to you as a water customer?*

Accountability scope - 10 mins

What types of decisions or issues do you think it's important that customers can hold their water company to account on? Why?

- Allow unprompted response, then probe as needed:
    - *Regular reflection on company performance in general / or focus on areas of bad performance?*
    - *Shorter term / reactive decisions – e.g. when there's an ongoing major problem with day-to-day service?*
    - *How the delivery of their plans for services is affecting people and the environment*
    - *Changes in bills and charges*
    - *All of this?*
    - *Something else?*

- *What would trigger you to want to hold your water company to account?*

Accountability outcomes – 5 mins What would you want to happen as a result of consumers holding their water company to account? (From consumers having greater influence and challenge power on decisions, services, performance and when something goes wrong)? And if a water company responded to what their consumers wanted – that is – they did something differently as a result of being held to account - how should this be shown to consumers? How would they become aware of this?	
19:10 – 19: 20	
Plenary: Introduce the 'consumer group' idea set out in the Ofwat consultation and aspects to consider.	Running slides
19:20 – 19:30	
Break	
19:30 – 20:10	
Participants returned to original groups with moderators they've met before. **Breakout groups** **Moderators to continue discussion in breakout groups:** *Hi – welcome back to your original group [reference location / incidents group]* **Accountability method** *As we just heard, there is an idea that there could be a 'consumer group' set up, one for each water company, which would be tasked with holding the company to account, to strengthen how consumers are heard by companies.* *As you heard in the plenary, this could work **alongside other ways that the company hear customer views** e.g. regular customer research, the Independent Challenge Group of expert voices, direct customer feedback/ complaints data, public meetings etc.*	Running slides

- *Please say your name and tell us what do you think of the idea of something like a new 'consumer group' to hold a water company to account and why? ~ 5 mins*

    - Seek initial reactions

Prompt with slide (21) on additional ways companies can meet the rule alongside the consumer group: ~ **5 mins**

    - *Are there other ways you'd want or prefer customers to be able to hold their water company to account? [check if other methods stand out as preferred to the consumer group]*

- *Who should be able to take part in one of these consumer groups? – 15 mins*

    - *Should all customers have this opportunity if they want to? How should people be chosen?*

    - *Thinking back to what you thought customers should be able to hold companies to account about – are there scenarios where customers with certain skills, knowledge or experiences would be more suitable? If so, when would this apply and why?*

        - *Do you think there should be separate groups or specific ways to make sure that people in more vulnerable circumstances are included in this?*

        - *Are there other sorts of customers who might need a different way to hold their company to account?*

    - *Who would you trust to represent your views if it wasn't customers directly? And why? What issues would you want another party to represent your views on?*

Think back to the quote from the MP – that the panel should have the power to summon board members and hold water executives to account - through new customer panels with teeth.

- *What would give the 'consumer group' the right powers and ability to act? What level of influence should they have? – 10 mins*

    - *How should the things that the company is held to account for be decided?*

- *Should the consumer group be able to set the agenda and call on relevant water company staff to prepare information and attend a meeting on specific issues of concern to consumers? Or regulators/other organisations?*

- *Should Senior Water Company Staff be required to attend this meeting?*

  - *Who would you want to attend from the Water company (If needed: e.g. Board members, Executives, people with relevant knowledge)*

- *Does this format – a consumer group requiring that senior water company staff attend a discussion about issues of consumer concern – feel like it has the potential to help consumers hold their water company to account? Why/Why not?*

  - *Or, should other organisations like CCW represent the views of the consumer group to water companies and others like the Independent Challenge Groups and Ofwat?*

- *What should the consumer group's level of influence over Company decisions be? (Would the company be required to give a response to them which answers their questions fully?)*

- *What should the relationship between the consumer group and expert stakeholders be - like an expert Independent Challenge Group that some companies have?*

20:10 - 20:25 Principles for effective consumer representation

We are now going to ask you for your ideas on the principles for the public to be involved in holding their water companies to account. And why?

(if needed: for customers to influence and challenge decisions, services, performance and when something goes wrong).

Please write in the chat some single words or short sentences, for principles for accountability. And why.

Moderator to gives the participants a few minutes, then ask them to take turns to talk through what they put and why.

- Press them to not only think of principles for how the company might act, but also principles that will give something like a consumer group, the power and ability to challenge and hold their water company to account
- Seek without leading to differentiate from the research and engagement principles – what principles will move this beyond a research forum, to customers being able to challenge and hold to account effectively
- Explore what they think of each other's - any agreement / disagreement areas

20:25 – 20:30 Next steps: Recap	
Plenary	Running slides

4. Consumers who need extra help Discussion Guide

Background:

20 x 'Vulnerable' customers

1.5 hr in-home/in-person (or online if strong preference from participant) depth with each customer

Locations: Central and Eastern, Northern, Wales, West & South West, London and SE

Sample characteristics:

- *Some on PSR*
- *Some financially vulnerable*
- *Some with disabilities*
- *Some with low/no internet usage*
- *Some speak English as a second language*
- *Sample likely to include people who need a reliable water supply, who would find it harder to manage if their water supply were disrupted, or those who need to use additional water*

Objectives:

Overall, this research seeks to understand:

- How can consumer research and engagement be meaningful and effective in delivering high quality water and sewerage services?
  - What are the principles for consumer engagement for every day services?
  - What are the principles for consumer engagement for business plan activities?
- How should consumers be involved in holding companies to account?
  - What are the principles for holding companies to account?
  - What models do consumers think could support these?

Moderator notes:

- *This guide should be useful flexible and adapted to participant needs.*
- *Before the session, moderator should be familiar with the individual's circumstances/vulnerability, and tailor questions as appropriate throughout the session.*
- *Check who their water/sewerage company is*
- *Check what they have consented to re. recording and data use.*
- *Moderator should take care to be flexible throughout the interview, taking note of whether the participant may need to take a short break during the discussion.*

> - *NB: 'Vulnerable' can be an off-putting term for many customers, please ensure not to use it when speaking with them, talk about 'customers who need extra help'*
>
> *When relevant, check with support person/carer for any clarifications*

Discussion outline – 90 minute in-home/online depth		
Section	**Questions and timing**	**Total section time**
Introductions	• **Intro to Blue Marble**	5 mins
Warm up and getting to know respondent	• **Level of English** • **Living situation** • **Day-to-day life** • **Physical/mental health conditions** • **Finances** • **Internet use** • **PSR** **(Timings to be tailored to respondent circumstances, approx. 2-3 mins per question)**	10 mins
Views on water companies	• **Climate survey questions** • **Word/phrase association** • **Familiarity with companies** • **Use of water around the home** • **Important water related topics** • **Spontaneous definition of accountability** **2-3 minutes per question**	15 mins
Research and engagement – everyday practice	• **Everyday activities - top 3 topics** **Scenario response** • **Level of detail/info** • **Ways of being engaged on topic** • **Ease of taking part in research** • **Representation from others** **3 mins per question**	15 mins

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Research and engagement – business planning	• **Business planning activities - top 3 topics** Scenario response • **Level of detail/info** • **Ways of being engaged on topic** • **Ease of taking part in research** • **Representation from others** **2-3 mins per question**	**15 mins**
Accountability	• **Examples of good/bad customer service** • **Defining holding water companies to account** • **Key topics/services for accountability** • **Desired information** • **Who should be involved** • **What should accountability look like** • **Outcomes** **3 mins per question**	**25 mins**
Wrap up	• **Final message – principles** • **Wrap up**	**5 mins**

Discussion guide

> • **Introduction (5 mins)**

Moderator introduction to Blue Marble:

- *Purpose of session: Thank you for joining. We're talking to people, to ask them how they think water and wastewater companies, can improve the way they find out what their customers want from their services.*
- *We also want to talk to you about how people can be involved in holding their water company to account.*
- *Introduction to Blue Marble: We are an independent research agency who run research on behalf of different companies and organisations. We are running this research on behalf of the Consumer Council for Water (CCW), the organisation which represents the customers of water companies, and Ofwat the water sector's economic regulator. We are not a part of their organisations.*

- ***Data protection:*** *this session will be audio [IF ONLINE: and video] recorded for analysis purposes. Researchers from Blue Marble may listen to this recording, and it will be used in line with what you have consented to during the recruitment process.*
- ***Encouragement:*** *please don't worry if you don't understand everything right now – we will talk through different information and questions. There are no right or wrong answers so please feel comfortable to be honest with your responses. We are just looking for your experience as a water customer.*

I am now going to START RECORDING

• Warm up and getting to know respondent (5 - 10 mins)

Objective: To understand more about participant vulnerability.

[Moderator to refer back to recruitment grid to remind self of the respondents circumstances – e.g. English as a second language, long-term physical/mental health condition etc.]

ONLY ASK THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE RELEVANT

Now I'd like to hear a little bit more about your personal circumstances. You have been asked to take part in this interview, as you may have particular circumstances or needs that could make dealing with things like a problem with the water supply, or a water bill, more difficult.

It's useful for us to understand your circumstances better, to make the research we are doing as helpful as possible for the water sector and to customers. But please don't feel you need to tell us anything you're uncomfortable with.

Please tell me a bit about yourself…

1. *[If relevant, i.e. non-English speaker]* **We're talking to each other through a translator today. Could you tell me a little bit more about your level of English, and how this affects your daily life?**

   - *Probe: overview of proficiency level and its impacts e.g. any activities they struggle to do on their own, any family/friends that translate for them / services they use to help e.g. Google Translate*

2. **Where do you live** [*if relevant – online/telephone interviews*] **and who do you live with?** *Probe: location (including probes on rurality), type of accommodation – size, type (flat, terraced etc.) tenancy status (owners, renting, other circumstances)*

   - How do you find it living there?

3. **Tell me a bit more about what your day-to-day life has looked like over the past 3 months:**

- What have the highlights been?

- What about the difficult moments?

- Walk me through what a typical day in your life looks like.

4. *[If relevant – disability long term physical or mental health conditions]* **I can see from the information given to us during the phone call with the recruiter that you** *[moderator to check how respondent describes their disability, long term health condition and/or mental health conditions and mirror this language: e.g. 'that you have a heart condition'].* **It's helpful for us to understand how this affects you day-to-day, so we can understand more about how it could affect your relationship with your water company. Could you please tell me a little bit more about it?**

   - How, if at all, does it impact your daily life?

   - *Probe: Overview of condition/s, any support or care they receive or aids they use, impact on daily activities, ability to work and finances*

5. **Overall, how are you currently feeling about the cost of living and your household finances?** *[If financially vulnerable, fully probe around this]*

   - *Probe: how do you feel about managing your water bill?*

6. *[If relevant i.e. low/no internet user]* **I understand that you would prefer not to use the internet if this can be avoided/you don't use the internet. Could you please tell me a bit more about this and how this impacts you?**

7. *[If relevant, i.e. on PSR]* Every water company keeps a list of customers who may need additional help or support with day-to-day services or when things go wrong. This is called the Priority Service Register, and it offers things like help with meter readings, different bill formats or additional support during incidents. **I understand that you or someone in your household is on the Priority Service Register. Can you tell me about what additional help or support you might need with day to day services?**

   - *Probe: need for reliable water supply/additional water/impact if water supply was disrupted*

- **Views on water companies (15 mins)**

Objective: to gather unstimulated views on water companies and what topics are important to them.

1. **I have a couple of survey-style questions to ask you now.**

- Firstly - how concerned, if at all, are you about climate change, sometimes called 'global warming'?

  A) Very concerned

  B) Fairly concerned

  C) Not very concerned

  D) Not at all concerned

  E) Don't know

- Next, thinking about what you buy, how you travel and how you live your day-to-day life, which one of these best describes you?

  A) I don't tend to think about my impact on the environment

  B) It's a bonus if what I'm doing is environmentally friendly, but it's not a big issue for me

  C) I think about my impact on the environment and try to make a difference without spending too much time or money

  D) I'm very concerned about my impact on the environment, and I spend considerable time or money to reduce it

Probe on reason for answer

I'd now like to talk about your views of water companies.

2. **What word or phrase comes to mind when you think about the water industry in the UK?**

   - Why did you pick this word?

3. **Do you know who your local water and sewerage company is?**

   - How familiar are you with them? Why?

   - What do you know about them?

   - What word or phrase comes to mind when you think about them?

   - How likely would you be to describe them as a good company to someone you know?

4. **Tell me about how you use water around the home, in your daily life?**

   - Do you feel/know if you use a lot of water?

   - Do you try to save water at all?

   - *Probe to understand any impact of vulnerability on reliance on water, any particular use, volume of use etc.*

5. **Later on, we will look at some of the key things your water company does day to day.**

   Can you think of anything that your water and wastewater company does that is particularly important to you? Why/why not? [Don't prompt at this stage – want to see unstimulated issues that are important to them]

   • Why are these issues important to you?

6. **Later on we're going to talk more about this – so just say what comes to mind for now. We'd like you to think about a customer 'holding a company to account'. What does 'holding a company to account' mean to you?**

   • What do you think customers 'holding a company to account' might involve?

   • Can you think of any examples of how customers can hold organisations to account or influence their services / decisions / performance?

• **Research and engagement – everyday water services (15 mins)**

Objective: To understand vulnerable customers' prompted views on the scope, method and outcomes for meaningful and effective consumer participation.

We are now going to talk about how water companies find out what their customers want from their services, and the bills that they pay. Water companies use this information to help them plan future services that customers want.

   • Customers are not able to choose their water company – this is called a 'monopoly'.

   • Think of a coffee shop for example – if you didn't like the service from one, you could go to a different one. You can't do that with your water and wastewater company

   • Water companies must give customers a say about what they want from their services

Water companies use different ways to find out what their customers think about their services. For example, they may use surveys/ questionnaires, interviews like this one, group discussion or bigger gatherings of customers.

Sometimes this is quite quick – like a survey. Sometimes water companies ask customers to be involved in longer term discussions with them over 2 or 3 years, so they become knowledgeable enough to give their views on more complicated topics.

Some of things they ask customers about are easier to understand and give an opinion on.

Sometimes they want customer opinions about the services that the water and sewerage company provides day-to-day.

Customers can get a financial payment for their time and effort taking part in these research and engagement activities, depending on what is involved.

Everyday water services (15 mins)

Firstly, I want to understand your views on the everyday services your water and sewerage company provide and what is important to you.

1. **Here is a list of the typical things your water company does – every day. Which are the 3 most important things to you, that you would want to be involved in influencing company decisions about - and why?**

[Show/read out summary from slide 2 in stimulus deck].

- Thinking about customers with circumstances that mean they would need extra help when engaging with their water company, or when something goes wrong with water supply (people in more vulnerable situations). Which services do you think they should most be involved in influencing?

Now I want you to imagine you are being asked to give your opinion on one of the company's day to day services. Imagine you are taking part in research – something a bit like this interview today.

Show Slide 3 – The company wants to improve the customer support service. It wants to know customer views about [read bullets].

I don't want you to answer the questions shown here specifically (on the slide) – rather imagine you are taking part in a research project about it.

2. **If you were being asked to give views on how the customer service could be better here, what would make taking part easier for you?**

- Is this service something you could give an opinion on if asked? E.g. how to improve it? [Explore why respondent feels they could give a view on it or not]

- Is there any information that could help you give your opinion? If so, what sort of information would you want them to show you? [Open question]

Only show the pyramid if appropriate to customer's interest/ability to explore the information – slide 4 – or use text below - explaining, sometimes company's give different amounts of detail when they are asking for customer views.

- [Then prompt] – How much information would you like to help you give your opinion on this topic? At what level of detail would you want to get involved in influencing company decision? For example

  o Lots of detail: all the behind-the-scenes data and information the company is considering e.g. performance data. This can involve things like the service targets the company has, whether they are meeting them or not. You might be asked to look at these and say

which you think is most important to you to improve, or if you think the target service level should be higher, lower, or is ok.

  o Medium level: the things the company could do and how it might do them. This could be the choices the company can make to improve the service once they have looked at the detail of their performance and their targets. You might be asked your view on which of these choices you prefer.

  o Limited detail: the key changes to the service: what they mean for customers, impact on experiences and bills. This could be what the company has decided after it has looked at lots of detail.

3. **(Referring to level of detail they have indicated) How easy or otherwise would you find it to give your views on this topic?**

  o What would make it easier for you?

  o Or more interesting for you to give your opinion on this?

4. **How would you prefer to be able to give your views on a topic like this – and why? (Open question, but if needed probe different research methods)**
  • What would make it easier for you to take part and why? (refer to some of their personal circumstances they have disclosed as necessary).

5. **How would you want the water company to demonstrate that you had influenced their decision?**

6. **Who else, if anyone, would you trust to take part in discussions or decisions on behalf of customers, on this topic?** *Probe on other organisations/individuals*
  • Are there any topics where you would prefer others to represent you? Why? Which topics? (refer back to list)

  • **Research and engagement – business planning services (15 mins)**

Objective: To understand vulnerable customers' prompted views on the scope, method and outcomes for meaningful and effective consumer participation.

Business planning services (15 mins)

Read intro: Every 5 years companies make a business plan that sets out how they want to develop their services and the proposed cost to customers.

  • Customers are not able to choose their water company – this is called a 'monopoly'.

  • Water companies must give customers a say about what they want from their services and the price they pay.

- Companies have to show to Ofwat – who oversee the different water companies - that their plans reflect what their customers want – that means shaping the plans based on what customers tell them – this is what we call 'business planning research'.

1. **Here is a list of the typical things your water company does as part of business planning. Which are the 3 most important things that you think customers should most be involved in influencing decisions about - and why?**
[Show/read out summary from slide 5 in stimulus deck].

- Thinking about customers with circumstances that mean they would need extra help when engaging with their water company, or when something goes wrong with water supply (people in more vulnerable situations). Which services do you think they should most be involved in influencing?

Now we have another scenario – Lucy is making a new Plan to help customers in vulnerable situations.

[Read out scenario from stim: Lucy developing vulnerability strategy on slide 6]

Show stim slide 7: Explain Lucy is doing some research to inform the new plan – she wants to understand what support vulnerable people in their area need.

For example, they need to know who is most at risk if the water supply is temporarily shut off due to maintenance work.

This means that they can plan ahead, so that these customers are supported in the way they would like

2. **Again – I don't want you to actually answer the question (how to get more people to sign up), I want you to imagine you have been asked to give your opinion.**
If you were taking part in a piece of research to give your views about the water company's plans to investigate what support vulnerable people in their area need, **what would make taking part easier for you?**

- Is this Plan something you could give an opinion on if asked? [Explore why respondent feels they could give a view on it or not]

- What would you want to know, to be able to give your opinion about what the company should do? [Open question]

Only show full pyramid – slide 8 - if appropriate to participant – otherwise refer to text below, explaining, sometimes company's give different amounts of detail when they are asking for customer views. Particularly when they are making business plans, there can be a lot of information to consider.

- [Then prompt] – what level of detail would you want to be involved with:
  - Would you like want a lot of detail on this topic? For example:
    - Lots of detail: all the behind-the-scenes data and information the company is considering e.g. performance data, customer satisfaction data
    - Medium level: the things the company could do and how it might do them
    - Low level of detail: the key changes to the service: what they mean for customers, impact on experiences and bills
- How could they make the information easy for you to understand?

3. **How easy or otherwise would you find it to give your views on this topic?**
   - What would make it easier for you to give your opinion?
   - Or more interesting?
   - How could your water company help you take part?

4. **How would you prefer to be able to give your views on a topic like this – and why? (Open question, but if needed probe different research methods)**
   a. What would make it easier for you to take part and why? (refer to some of their personal circumstances they have disclosed as necessary).

5. **How would you want the water company to show that you had influenced their decision?**

6. **Who else, if anyone, would you trust to take part in discussions or decisions on behalf of customers, on this topic?** *Probe on other organisations/individuals*
   - Are there any topics where you would prefer others to represent you? Why? Which topics? (refer back to list)

- **Accountability (25 mins)**

Objective: To understand vulnerable customers' prompted views on the scope, method and outcomes for how consumers hold water companies to account.

We are now going to talk about accountability.

1. **Can you think of a time, where a company or organisation, listened to your opinion about something? Perhaps they changed what they were doing based on your views?**

   - How did it feel to you?

There is a proposed new UK law, the Water Company 'Special Measures Bill'. This includes customers being able to hold their water companies to account. Ofwat are consulting on how this should be done . *[Show stim slide 9 and read it through with them].*

2. **What does customers 'holding water companies to account' mean to you?**

   - What would you want this to achieve for customers and the services they get?

   - How important is this to you? Why?

3. **What things / services do you want to hold companies to account on?**

Allow unprompted response

Then prompting:

   - *Everyday services and business planning topics lists from earlier*

   - *Would you want to hold your company to account more on the everyday services you receive, or the bigger business planning topics? Or both? Why?*

Then prompt with

   - *Series of media headlines on topics – Slides 10 (negative) and 11 (positive)*

   - *Explore respondent's interest in more negative or positive topics being important for customers to hold companies to account on*

4. **With these topics in mind - what sort of information would you need to know to hold them to account on these topics?**

   - How could this information be easy for you to understand and use?

We want to talk to you about how customers could have more say about their water services. This might be through something like a customer committee, or other ideas.

This is about how consumers can be more involved in decision-making and holding water companies to account for their services and performance.

5. **Who should be involved?**

- Which sort of customers should be involved in holding water companies to account?
    - Probe: Should everyone have the chance to?
    - Probe: Who should decide who gets to take part?
- If it wasn't just customers, who should be included in addition to/instead of customers?
    - Probe – experts? People who represent particular groups of customers?
    - For which sorts of topics?

6. **How could customers like you take part in 'holding water companies to account'?**

- If it were through a committee of customers what would this look like? How should customers be able to get involved in this?
- How else could people take part?   [open then prompt]
    i. Public forums, where anyone can turn up
    ii. Something like school governors, chosen from local people
    iii. Something like a patient group in hospitals, where patients with experience of the health service can come along
    iv. Feeding in views e.g. online

7. **Thinking about an everyday service problem, like how a company acts when a there is a big burst pipe somewhere versus how it is performing on delivering its big business plan commitments**:

- Do you think there's a difference between **which customers** should get involved in accountability on those different things?
- Do you think there's a difference on **how customers** would want to be involved in accountability?

8. **What would you want your water company to do as a result of being held to account by their customers?**

- What would make you feel that holding them to account was worthwhile and had made things better for customers?
- How should this be shown to you?

- **Wrap up (5 mins)**

1. **Think now about everything we've spoken about, in terms of how you would want water companies should get your views. What things (guiding principles) do you think companies should do to help people take part and give their views?**
[Allow spontaneous response, then prompt using 5 principles on slide 15 of stimulus deck if needed].

Thank and close.

5. Non-household customer Discussion Guide

Background:

20 x non-household customers

1 hr online depth with each customer

Locations: Central and Eastern, Northern, Wales, West & South West, London and SE

Sample characteristics:

- *Water bill payers/employees at managerial level/responsible for utilities*
- *Mix of small and medium business*
- *Mix of sectors*
- *Mix of water use (domestic/consumer and industrial), and consumption patterns*
- *Some aware of retail competition in the NHH water market*
- *Some unaware of retail competition*
- *Some to have switched water retailer*

Objectives:

Overall, this research seeks to understand:

- How can consumer research and engagement be meaningful and effective in delivering high quality water and sewerage services?
  - What are the principles for consumer engagement for every day services?
  - What are the principles for consumer engagement for business plan activities?
- How should consumers be involved in holding companies to account?
  - What are the principles for holding companies to account?
  - What models do consumers think could support these?

Moderator notes:

- *Before the session, moderator should be familiar with the details of the business, and tailor questions as appropriate throughout the session.*
- *Check who their water/sewerage retailer and supplier is*
- *Check what they have consented to re. recording and data use.*

Discussion outline – 60 minute online depth		
Section	**Questions and timing**	**Total section time**
Introductions	• **Intro to Blue Marble**	**5 mins**

	• Business circumstances • How water is used in the business	
Views on and engagement with water retailers/suppliers	• Awareness of market competition • Interactions with retailer/supplier • Experiences of switching or not • Sentiment towards wider industry • Spontaneous definition of accountability	10 mins
Research and engagement	• Everyday and business planning activities - top 3 topics • Level of detail/info • Ways of being engaged on topic • Ease of taking part in research • Representation from others • Principles for best practice	20 mins
Accountability	• Examples of accountability from their business context • Defining holding water companies to account • Key topics/services for accountability • Desired information • Who should be involved • What should accountability look like • Outcomes	20 mins
Wrap up	• Final message – accountability principles • Wrap up	5 mins

Discussion guide

• Intro, warm up and getting to know respondent (5 mins)

Objective: To understand more about individual non-household circumstances and how water is used

[Moderator to refer back to recruitment grid to remind self of the respondent's role and details about their organisation. If possible, select a term other than 'non-household', e.g. business or organisation and use throughout the interview]

Moderator introduction to Blue Marble:

- *Purpose of session:* Thank you for joining. We're talking to businesses/organisations to ask them how they think water and sewerage companies, can improve the way they find out what their customers want from their services.
- We also want to talk to you about how organisations can be involved in holding their water company to account.
- As we talk, please try to answer from the perspective of the organisation / business – not your views of how you use water at home.
- *Introduction to Blue Marble:* We are an independent research agency who run research on behalf of different companies and organisations. We are running this research on behalf of the Consumer Council for Water (CCW), the organisation which represents the customers of water companies, and Ofwat the water sector's economic regulator. We are not a part of their organisations.
- *Data protection:* this session will be audio and video recorded for analysis and reporting purposes. Researchers from Blue Marble will listen to this recording, and it will be used in line with what you have consented to during the recruitment process.
- *Encouragement:* There are no right or wrong answers so please feel comfortable to be honest with your responses. We are just looking for your experience as a non-household water customer.
- *Check happy to proceed*

I am now going to START RECORDING

- To start with, please tell me a little bit about [your business / the organisation] you work for, what it does and what your role is
- What are the current challenges for your business? And what has been going well?
- What do you use water for in your business?
  - Used by employees e.g. in office spaces
  - Used in consumer setting e.g. washing dishes, in hair salons
  - Industrial use e.g. in the making of a product or as part of your service

[If time:

- Do you feel/know if your organisation uses a lot of water?

- Does it try to save water at all?]

- **Views on water companies (10 mins)**

Objective: to gather spontaneous views on water companies and what topics are important to them.

I'd now like to talk about your views on water companies in general (suppliers, not retailers)

- What word or phrase comes to mind when you think about the water industry in the UK?
  - Why did you pick this word?

And now let's talk about your business' experiences dealing with your water and supply and sewerage services

Talk through **slide 2, explaining** *retailer/supplier set-up*

- Was any of this information familiar to you? How did you know about this?
  - *Probe on whether any knowledge was gained through process of switching providers, where appropriate*

- Who is your water retailer? *Prompt if they aren't sure*
  - How familiar are you with them? Why? *Probe for details of any interactions*

- Who is your water /sewerage service provider? *Prompt if they aren't sure*
  - How familiar are you with them? Why? *Probe for details of any interactions*
  - What do you know about them?
  - What word or phrase comes to mind when you think about them?
  - How likely would you be to describe them as a good company to someone you know? Why?

- **Research and engagement – (20 mins)**

Objective: To understand non-household customers' prompted views on the scope, method and outcomes for meaningful and effective consumer participation.

Topic prioritisation (5 mins)

We are now going to talk about how water/sewerage suppliers (that is your supplier, not your retailer) find out what their customers want from their services. Water suppliers use this information to help them plan future services that customers want.

- *Non-household customers can choose their water retailer i.e. who you pay your bills to – but are not able to choose their water/sewerage supplier*

- *As there is no choice about who provides water and sewerage services, these companies must give customers a say about what they want from their services*

Water/sewerage service suppliers use different ways to find out what their customers think about their services. For example, they may use surveys/ questionnaires, interviews like this one, group discussion or bigger gatherings of customers.

Sometimes this is quite quick – like a survey. Sometimes water suppliers ask customers to be involved in longer term discussions with them over 2 or 3 years, so they become knowledgeable enough to give their views on more complicated topics.

Sometimes they want customer opinions about the services that the water and sewerage company provide day-to-day.

Some of things they ask customers about are easier to understand and give an opinion on, and at other points they would like to see customer feedback on more complex topics.

For example, a quick survey about how well your water supplier communicated with you during a water supply issue affecting your organisation should be easy to complete without much additional information.

A survey about plans to make sure there is enough water to go around in 25 years' time may require reviewing detailed options and their impacts.

So talking to customers about different types of services and decisions, and improving how this is done, means thinking about the level of detail and information that people need to be able to give their views on things.

Everyday services

Sometimes suppliers want customer opinions about the services that they as water and sewerage companies, provide day-to-day.

Firstly, I want to understand your views on the everyday services your water and sewerage supplier provide and what is important to you.

- Here is a list of the typical things your water supplier does – every day. Which are the 3 most important things to you, that you would want to be involved in influencing company decisions about - and why?

[Show/read out summary from slide 4 in stimulus deck].

Business planning

Read intro: Every 5 years companies make a business plan that sets out how they want to develop their services and the proposed cost to customers.

Suppliers have to show to Ofwat – who oversee the different water suppliers - that their plans reflect what their customers want – that means shaping the plans based on what customers tell them – this is what we call 'business planning research'.

- Here is a list of the typical things your water supplier does as part of business planning. Which are the 3 most important things that you would want to be involved in, and why?
- **[Show/read out summary from slide 5 in stimulus deck].**

Research practice (10 mins)

- *Imagine that the water supplier is asking for your organisation's views on a decision it is making.*
- How would you want to be able to give the views of your organisation?
    - o What would prevent or exclude you (or another relevant representative from your organisation) from taking part and why?
    - o What would motivate your organisation to take part and why?
    - o What support, if any, would help your organisation to take part?
    - o Would it work better for your organisation to complete a survey or have a discussion? Why?

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- o Would it work better for your organisation to give views face-to-face or online? why?
- o For a complex topic, would it work better for your organisation to understand the general idea and options, or get into detail?
- o What support or information, if any, would help you to understand any more complex topics?

- How would you want the water supplier to demonstrate that the views of non-household organisations had influenced their decisions?

Thinking now about everything we've talked about (5 mins):

- What things (guiding principles) do you think water and sewerage suppliers should follow to help businesses take part and give their views?

[Allow spontaneous response, then prompt using slide 6
- *What are your initial reactions? Are these principles right for your organisation? Do they reflect your views/needs?*
- *Which principles are important to you? Why?*
- *Is anything missing?*

• **Accountability (20 mins)**

Objective: To understand non-household customers' prompted views on the scope, method and outcomes for how businesses/organisations can hold water companies to account.

Accountability: info, scope, outcomes (10 mins)

We are now going to talk about accountability.

- How, if at all, do you think that your organisation can hold any of the companies you work with, or whose services you use, to account as a customer? *E.g. suppliers, other utilities etc.*

[Show stim slide 7, and read it through with them].

There is a proposed new law under consideration in Parliament, the Water Company 'Special Measures Bill', which aims to hold water suppliers (not the retailer) more accountable if they harm the environment or don't deliver good services for customers.

The law states that Ofwat needs to set rules for the water industry, which give customers (including non-household customers) a way to hold their water/sewerage service provider to account. This may include a new consumer group.

There have been a lot of concerns over whether water and sewerage companies are performing adequately, delivering their commitments, investing in and managing infrastructure properly.

While water companies have been taking action, listening to customer feedback and trying to communicate with the public – in a system where you can't choose your company - there remains a sense that companies are falling short of being accountable to their customers.

What are your initial reactions to there being new rules to ensure customers have a way to hold their water company to account?

- *How important is this to your organisation? When is it important to you as an organisation/business - what would make your organisation want to hold your water/sewerage service provider to account?*
  - *Probe for any impact of the retailer/supplier split on their ability to hold suppliers to account in the current system e.g., not being able to directly contact supplier etc.*
  -

Accountability scope

What types of things do you think it's important that non-household customers can hold their water supplier to account on? Why?

- **Allow unprompted response, then probe as needed***:*
  - *Regular reflection on company performance in general / or focus on areas of bad performance?*
  - *Shorter term / reactive decisions – e.g. when there's an ongoing major problem with day-to-day service?*
  - *How the delivery of their plans for services is affecting people and the environment*
  - *Changes in bills and charges*
  - *All of this?*
  - *Something else?*

Accountability outcomes

What would you want to happen as a result of organisations like yours holding their water company to account?

(From consumers having greater influence and challenge on decisions, services, performance and when things go wrong)

And if a water company responded to what their non-household customers wanted – that is – how should they find out they had been listened to and something had changed?

Method (10 mins)

There is an idea that there could be a 'consumer group' set up, one for each water company, which would focus on holding the company to account, to strengthen how consumers are heard by companies.

*This could work **alongside other ways that the company hear customer views** e.g. regular customer research, the groups of expert voices, direct customer feedback/ complaints data, public meetings etc.*

We want to hear you views as a non-household organisation, on what this consumer group should look like.

• What do you think of the idea of a new 'consumer group' to hold a water company to account and why?

> • Seek initial reactions

> • Are there other ways you'd want customers to be able to hold their water company to account? [check if other methods stand out as preferred]

Show slide 10

We're going to discuss some of the aspects shown on this slide when thinking about your views about what would make the most effective consumer group.

- What kind of non-household organisations should be able to take part in the consumer group? Should:
  - All organisations have this opportunity if they want to? How should they be chosen?
  - What types of organisations should be involved and why?
    - And what level of knowledge/expertise, if any, should be required to take part?
  - What other organisations, if any, would you trust to represent your views as a non-household customer if you didn't attend the group yourself? And why?

- *Should the consumer group be able to set the agenda and call on relevant water company staff to prepare information and attend a meeting on issues of concern to consumers (including non-household organisations)?*

- *Should Senior Water Company Staff be required to attend this meeting?*

- *Does this format – a consumer group requiring that senior water company staff attend a discussion about issues of consumer concern feel like it has the potential to help consumers (including non-household organisations) hold their water company to account? Why/Why not?*

- *What should the consumer group's level of influence over Company decisions be? (Would the company be required to give a response to them which answers their questions fully?)*

• Wrap up (5 mins)

Think now about everything we've spoken about:

- What principles should there be for involving non-household organisations in holding water suppliers to account?

[Allow spontaneous response, then prompt using slide 11].

- *What are your initial reactions? Are these principles right for your organisation? Do they reflect your views/needs?*
- *Which principles are important to you? Why?*
- *Is anything missing?*

Thank and close.