



# WRMP24 WRAP and Stakeholder engagement method statement

## 1.1 Research objectives

South Staffs Water PLC (SSC) provides a secure and reliable supply of high-quality drinking water to approximately 1.6 million people in its two areas of supply – South Staffs and Cambridge.

- South Staffs Water (SSW) supplies high quality drinking water to approximately 1.3m people living in approximately 540,000 properties and working in 30,000 premises over 1,500 square km in the West Midlands, South Staffordshire, South Derbyshire, North Warwickshire and North Worcestershire areas.
- Cambridge Water (CAM) supplies high quality drinking water to approximately 133,000 people living in approximately 136,000 properties and working in 8.600 premises across Cambridge and the surrounding region.

At least every five years, water companies are required to prepare a fully updated Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP). This sets out in detail how each supply region plans to meet the demand for water over at least the next 25-year planning period. Both SSC supply regions face challenges around ensuring a sustainable, long-term demand vs supply balance (SBD) given the impacts of rapid population growth, climate change on rainfall patterns, the need to reduce abstraction from rivers and aquifers to protect water environments and now the additional impact of increased household consumption (PCC) caused by the ongoing COVID pandemic – particularly in the SSW supply region. Overall, the SBD challenge is more acute in the Cambridge region given the challenges faced. SSC, therefore, required a robust and comprehensive customer engagement programme to support the development of the draft WRMP24 in each supply region, which was also in line with the guidance from SSC's key external stakeholders.

The key outputs of the research programme, as a whole, were to provide SSC with a rich insight source which:

- Ensured customers could express their preferences of what they want SSC to achieve from an environmental and long-term operational resilience perspective to set the "ambition" benchmark for WRMP24 and provide a "golden thread" through the engagement programme, including determining what a Best Value Planning (BVP) means to them.
- Robustly reflected customers' preferences on the balance of supply vs demand side options in the WRMP24 and to inform the metrics and/or weightings to be used in the Multi Criteria Analysis to ensure customers' preferences are built into the modelling to deliver a BVP and alternatives.

- Informed deep dives into customers' preferences for major WMP24 policy decisions in areas that customers can have a considered input into and which will have the biggest impact on their future service.
- Through acceptability testing of the draft plans, tested whether the two WRMP24 (SSW and CAM) are acceptable and affordable for customers and specifically to understand why customers might not support the draft plan.

As part of the wider research programme undertaken to address the above objectives, Community Research convened and moderated a Customers' or Citizens' Advisory Panel (CAP). This qualitative panel approach was designed to complement the other components of the programme which included quantitative research on decision metrics and weights and acceptability/affordability testing. Workshops were also conducted with stakeholder audiences in SSW and CAM.

## 1.2 Overall WRAP approach

A CAP is a group of customers who are convened (multiple times) to feed into an organisation's thinking on their priorities, business plans, service or policy developments or strategic direction. Unlike more standard customer engagement, CAPs allow for a continuous, ongoing two-way dialogue with informed customers. This engenders trust on both sides and allows consumers to input into complex issues and ongoing debates within organisations.

In this instance, the panel was called the Water Resources Advisory Panel or WRAP.

Ofwat's 2017 Tapped In report<sup>1</sup> encourages companies to view customers as active participants - *"Companies need to move from seeing customers as recipients of services, to seeing them as active participants in the delivery of those services."*

The WRAP forms a key element of moving towards this ambition, taking a broadly representative group of customers along that path; increasing their understanding and giving them a voice within the business. The approach gave a clear steer on consumers' views and priorities as well as offering a compelling narrative about the journey that participants went on throughout the WRAP process, both individually and collectively.

## 1.3 WRAP sample/audience

Separate WRAP panels were recruited in each region; each panel comprised current household customers, future customers and SMEs. Participants were then reconvened for each research activity. A breakdown of the WRAP is shown overleaf.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1941\\_OFWAT\\_Cust\\_Participation\\_Report\\_final.pdf](https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1941_OFWAT_Cust_Participation_Report_final.pdf)



**Figure 1 – WRAP panel composition at each stage of the process**

WRAP participants	SSW	CAMBS
Total	22	25
SME owners ( <i>mix sectors and size</i> )	5	5
Future bill payers – ( <i>mix of current work / study and home circumstances</i> )	4	5
Bill-payers (jointly or solely responsible for bill), of which:	13	15
Gender		
Male	12	10
Female	10	15
Age		
18 to 24	4	5
25 to 39	5	8
40 to 54	10	4
55 to 70	2	7
70+	1	1
Children at home		
Children in household	5	6
Ethnicity		
BAME Background	4	4

WRAP participants	SSW	CAMBS
Socio Economic Group		
ABC1	13	18
C2DE	9	7
Working status		
Employed (full or part time)	18	19
Water Meter in Home		
Yes	14	17
Home location		
Rural	4	16
Vulnerable circumstances		
Vulnerability (financial/health)	5	5

By recruiting a heterogeneous group of participants we ensured that individuals were exposed to others' views on the subject and were able to discuss the issues with people from a different background to themselves. This gave participants a range of perspectives to help them inform their own thinking – an important part of the deliberative process. This also allowed people to move beyond their own individual concerns and take a citizen or community perspective. At the same time, we explored and captured reactions of individuals, since people will have expectations that are based on their own individual circumstances.

#### 1.4 WRAP recruitment process

A number of research approaches were used in order to recruit participants onto the WRAP. Some recruitment was conducted via an online panel run by [Panelbase](#). Additional purposive recruitment of customers was conducted by our specialist recruitment partner, [Central Fieldwork](#) in order to meet specific quotas.

In addition, SSC invited customers on their Priority Services Register to opt into the research to ensure some representation of customers with additional needs.

Screening materials and quotas used when recruiting were approved in advance. Quality checks were implemented throughout the recruitment process to ensure that all participants met the criteria we have agreed.

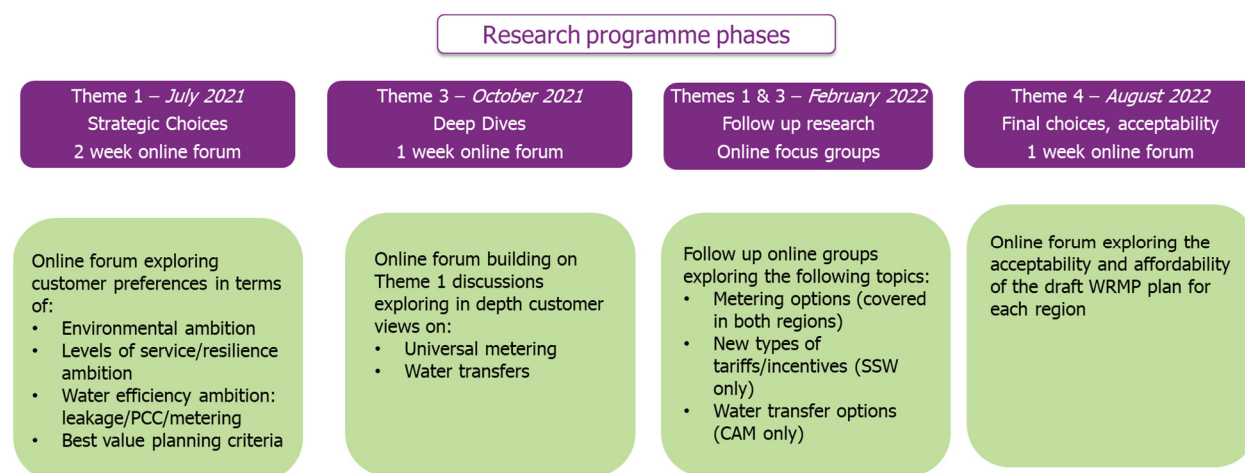
All research activities were incentivised to reflect participants' time and effort and to help ensure the recruitment and retention of a wide cross section of participants.



## 1.5 WRAP research activities

The overall WRAP research programme is shown in Figure 2 with a summary of the content of each wave of research activity. The WRAP was not used for Theme 2 Decision Metrics and Weights as this was purely a quantitative phase.

**Figure 2 – Overall WRAP approach**



Much of the research conducted with the WRAP was in the form of online forums. The online forums were largely deliberative in nature in that we provided participants with information and explored both their top of mind responses, as well as their more considered informed points of view once new information had been gradually introduced.

Every effort was made to ensure that the information provided to participants was not leading, or indeed misleading. Information was confined as far as possible to irrefutable, documented fact. However, participants were encouraged to ask questions and participate in a dialogue, in order to become more informed. Participants could ask questions throughout the online forums and SSC was able to respond through Community Research moderators.

One benefit of this kind of forum is that we are able to control how and when participants are able to see other people's contributions. This means that we can choose whether people answer questions 'blind' to how others answer them or not – for example, there may be some areas where it will be important to get individuals true spontaneous views, without any outside influences – and other times when the forum will benefit from people seeing others' answers and responding themselves in turn. As participants chose anonymous usernames, the SSC team and the Customer Panel could observe the forums in real time.

A number of approaches were used on the forums to both give information and allow participants to respond:

- Online quizzes were used to impart contextual information in a fun way.



- Bespoke animations with voiceovers were created to ensure that participants did not have to read long documents.
- Demand and supply options for future investment were outlined using 'Top Trumps' style information cards.
- Rather than purely asking for written feedback, participants could give their views through a video selfie or placing themselves on a spectrum and giving their rationale.
- Participants could view other participants' responses throughout – both being able to read individual responses once they had answered themselves and aggregated summaries provided by the moderators (in the form of slide summaries and heat maps).

## 1.6 Stakeholder research

As part of the research and engagement programme, two stakeholder roundtables were conducted in October 2021 (one in each of the supply regions). The sessions were convened at an early stage of the plan development process to ensure that stakeholder views are considered at a formative stage.

Stakeholders with an interest in and/or who are affected by decisions in the plan were invited to attend. A full list of these organisations can be found in the main report, but in summary:

- In CAM, there were 18 attendees from a wide range of organisations, including local environmental and river groups, national environmental organisations, a water retailer for businesses, a social housing provider, a local authority planning department, a university and an MP. Although a wide range of organisations were invited, the Cambridge Water roundtable did not have a completely representative mix of organisations with a relatively large number of environmental groups in attendance.
- In SSW, there were eight attendees representing local authorities, voluntary sector support organisations, environment organisations and business. Attendees held a range of positions within their organisations and were not always familiar with all of the issues discussed. Although a comprehensive list of organisations was invited to attend the sessions, the South Staffs Water roundtable did not have a completely representative mix of organisations.

Also present at both sessions were representatives from SSC and the company's Customer Panel. A summary of the draft WRMP was presented by the SSC team and then questions were invited from the audience prior to a number of breakout sessions to allow for debate and discussion in smaller groups.

Community Research Ltd chaired the event, facilitated the breakout sessions and produced this summary of feedback to ensure an independent record of the session was provided. The session was held prior to the launch of any formal consultation



and so was held under the Chatham House Rule with comments not being attributed to specific organisations or attendees.

## 1.7 Analysed data

The research programme resulted in the generation of a large amount of data. We adopted a grounded approach to analysis and reporting; with our findings drawn from the views of participants. Key quotes and examples were included to illustrate and amplify the general findings which were drawn out.

The following data has been analysed to inform the final research report:

- Online forums
  - Written feedback in response to questions/tasks from participants.
  - Polling data from qualitative surveys
  - Individual voting on plan options.
  - Self-filmed video feedback
  - Evaluation questionnaires.
- Roundtables and online group discussions
  - Comprehensive facilitator notes and quotes based on audio recordings.

## 1.8 Caveats/limitations/considerations

The main limitations we see for the WRAP are as follows:

- The sample is, to some extent, self-selecting and this creates a question as to how participants who choose to take part in the research differ from those who are not interested in doing so. Those individuals that do come forward to participate may not be entirely representative of the wider population; their willingness to be part of the research may set them apart in some way. To an extent this is the nature of all research. We have tried to mitigate against this by offering a sizeable incentive for each research activity; using a trusted and experienced recruitment agency; reassuring participants of their anonymity and generally ensuring that taking part is not onerous or disruptive but is, in fact, enjoyable and enlightening. Evaluation ratings of the process by participants were very high as was the retention of panellists throughout the WRAP programme. The final activity (Theme 4) was completed by 13 of the original 22 SSW WRAP members and 13 of the original 25 CAM WRAP members.
- Qualitative research, by its very nature, calls for in depth discussion with a relatively small number of individuals. Recruiting a higher number of participants for the panel would be prohibitively expensive and disproportionate given the fact that there are diminishing returns and we are unlikely to uncover new insights with a much larger sample. The research generated insights into a range of perceptions relating to WRMP decisions but does not give a robust indication of the extent to which these perceptions are shared across the wider population. However, the WRAP activities were designed to sit alongside (and complement) other quantitative research which does give scope for this extrapolation of results.



- It should be noted that the WRAP was conducted purely online and so excluded those who were not digitally literate. This was a pragmatic decision given it was convened during the Covid pandemic when face to face research was impossible. The online approach did have benefits in terms of allowing for greater geographic reach than face to face research. Also, consideration was given to the inclusion of consumers in vulnerable circumstances. There are many individuals in vulnerable circumstances (for example, those who are 'just about managing'/in debt/poverty; those with long term physical or mental health conditions or mobility issues; the frail elderly etc.) who are able to participate online and, in fact, find it easier than attending face to face sessions. However, we are conscious that some vulnerable people (i.e. those who are visually, sensory or cognitively impaired and those who are digitally excluded) are unable to participate online. It would have been too difficult to adequately replicate the complexity of content in depth interviews with these audiences. It was, therefore, decided that the views of these audiences would be represented through liaison with intermediary organisations and were included in the three quantitative studies that ran alongside the WRAP.

A further consideration is the timing of the research programme and the external influences on opinion. Research on Theme 1 was conducted during July 2021 and the experiences of during Covid lockdown that took place immediately before the fieldwork and this could have influenced views of participants. It is impossible to know definitively how their views may have differed, but for example it may be that views on environmental destination may have been influenced by a heightened awareness of the environment during the pandemic i.e. with people spending more time in nature. There is some evidence<sup>23</sup> that this may be the case.

It should also be noted that the research conducted for Themes 3 and 4 was conducted at a time when costs of living were high on everyone's radar – with rising inflation, energy and food prices. This is very likely to have influenced people's perceptions of the affordability of the cost of the options shown to them during the engagement in spite of the associated bill increases not taking effect for several years.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/howhaslockdownchangedourrelationshipwithnature/2021-04-26>

<sup>3</sup> <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2022/05/18/people-and-nature-survey-how-has-covid-19-changed-the-way-we-engage-with-nature/>

