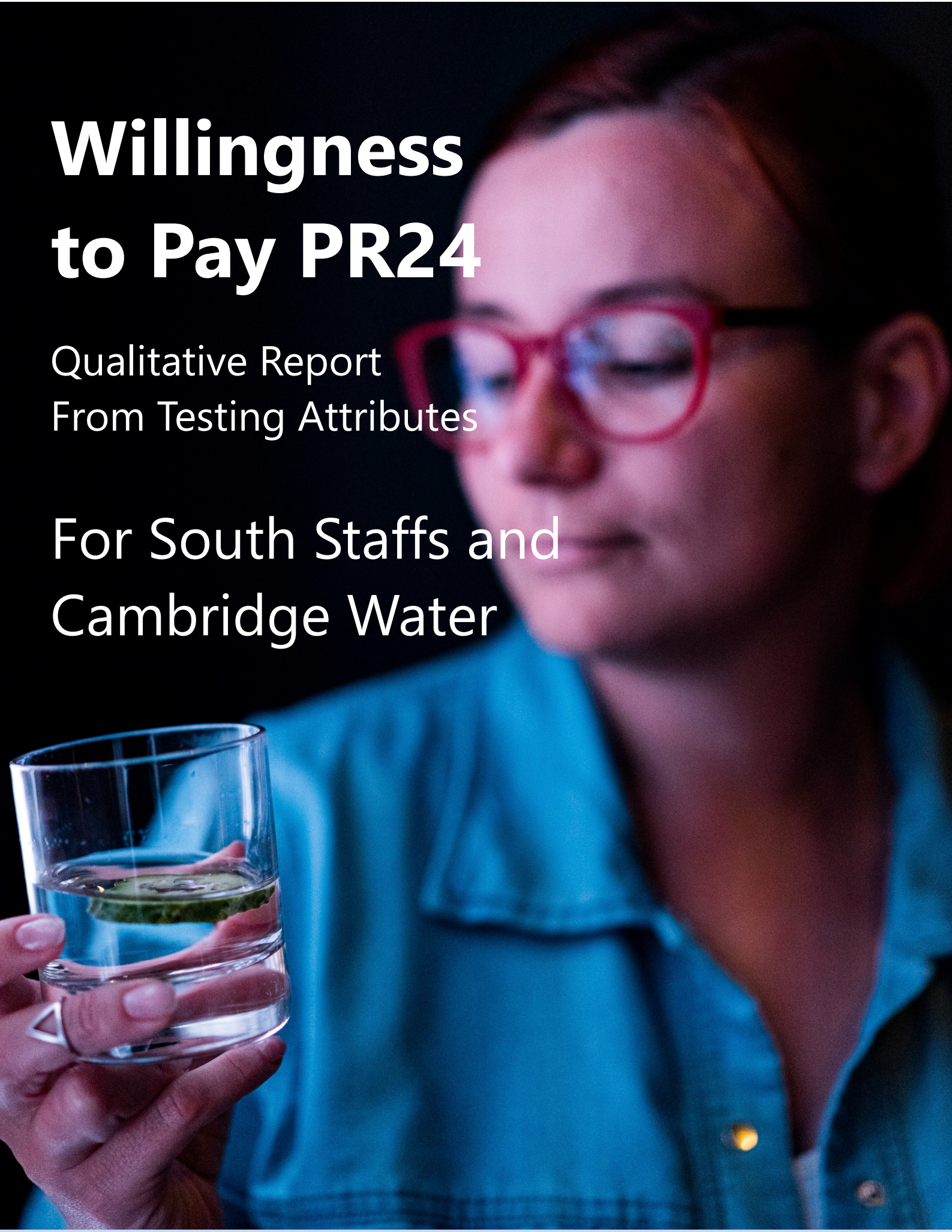
Willingness to Pay PR24

Qualitative Report From Testing Attributes

For South Staffs and Cambridge Water



Qa Research

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1. Introduction

This document produced by Qa Research provides the outcomes of qualitative research undertaken with household and non-household customers of South Staffs and Cambridge Water (SSC) to inform the development of a Willingness to Pay (WTP) survey for the PR24 business plan.

The aim of this report is to provide advice and direction to SSC, NERA (the economic consultancy responsible for calculating the valuations resulting from the WTP survey) and Qa Research's quantitative survey developers. The goal of this is to help ensure the wording of the proposed attributes and associated service level metrics are written in to the WTP survey in a way that customers will be able to understand and provide a valid opinion on.

2. Aims & Objectives

The aim of the qualitative research exercise was to:

'Test customers' levels of understanding and suggested areas for improvement with regards to the phrasing of a series of 10 attributes and associated service level descriptions to use in a quantitative Willingness to Pay survey'

3. Methodology & sample

Insight from general household and non-household customers was collected via qualitative co-development workshops, each lasting 3 hours, using the zoom video platform.

Vulnerable household customer insight was collected via one-to-one in-depth interviews using either the zoom video platform or a telephone interview, depending on the access to technology available to the participants. Each interview lasted for an hour.

All participants were South Staffs or Cambridge Water customers. Recruitment was organised by Qa Research's fieldwork management team.

Fieldwork took place w/c 8th and w/c 15th August 2022.

The full sample breakdown can be found below;

General Household customer sample (GHH)

Quota	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Date	**10th August 6.15-9.15pm**	**11th August 6.15-9.15pm**	**16th August 6.45-9.45pm**
Life stage	Pre-family (under 35, no children)	Family (at least 1 child living at home)	Post-family
Social grade	5x D 1x C2	3x C1 3x C2	2xA/B 4x B
Region / water company	South Staffs	South Staffs	Cambridge
Rural / urban	Town/city	Semi-rural/rural	1x urban, 5x rural/semi-rural
Metered	3x metered 3x unmetered	3x metered 3x unmetered	3x metered 3x unmetered
Water supply or billing / customer service issues	2x customers with issues in past 2 yrs	2x customers with issues in past 2 yrs	2x customers with issues in past 2 yrs
Age	Mix of age	Mix of age	Mix of age
Gender	4x female 2x male	3x female 3x male	4x female 2x male
Ethnicity	1x BAME	1x BAME	1x BAME
Other	No future bill payers	Mix of younger and older children	2 people over 70

Non-Household customer sample (NHH)

Quota	Group 4	Group 5
Date	**16th August 6.15-9.15pm**	**16th August 6.45-9.45pm**
Size	0x sole traders 5x small-medium firms 1x larger firm (250+)	0x sole traders 6x small-medium firms 0x larger firm (250+)
Region / water company	South Staffs	Cambridge
Rural / urban	2x city 2x town 2x rural	6x rural
Business sector	1x Manufacturing	1x Retail & Trade

	1x Agriculture 2x Construction 2x Retail & Trade	1x Professional Services 1x Manufacturing 1x Agriculture 1x Education 1x Arts & Entertainment
Water dependent	3x dependent 3x not dependent	3x dependent 3x not dependent
Water supply or billing / customer service issues	1x issues in past 2 yrs	No issues in past 2 yrs
Other	1x female, 5x male 4x under 50, 2x over 50	4x female, 2x male 2x under 50, 4x over 50

Vulnerable Household Customer sample (VHH):

Quota	Depth interviews (x12)
VHH categories (Some met multiple criteria)	3x Elderly (75+) living alone 6x Long term physical or mental health condition 7x Regularly struggle to pay bill OR have a very low income (household income under £23k)
Region / water company	8x South Staffs 4x Cambridge
Rural / urban	Mix of rural, town, city – min 2x of each
Metered	Min 4x metered
Age	5x 25-39 1x 40-54 3x 55-69 3x 70+
Gender	8x female 4x male
Ethnicity	2x BAME
Digitally excluded	8x digitally excluded (conducted via telephone)
Discounted tariff	0x Assure scheme discounted tariff, but 1x previously on payment plans for water debt

Tools used to gauge customer opinion

In order to gauge customers level of understanding of the attributes and service levels and to allow them to suggest amendments / improvements to make them easier to comprehend, Qa produced a series of showcards to describe each attribute.

A version A and a version B of the same attribute were shown, with each version trying to communicate the same thing but using different words and numeric examples.

Version A was devised by SSC, with version B designed by Qa.

The same structure was applied as to version B as had been issued in version A, but alternative language and service level metrics were deployed so that customers could deliberate on which they preferred / or rejected from either A or B.

Qa was able to create a B version using its expertise and lessons learnt from extensively engaging customers in the water sector over a 15-year period during price reviews and on other studies.

Overall, 10 attributes were tested, but 12 will be shown in the Willingness to Pay survey. A revised version of the additional 2 attributes will be produced using the principles established from the fieldwork.

Qa recommended that no more than 10 attributes were tested during the qualitative research stage. From our experience, testing anymore than this could cause participants to lose interest. On similar studies, such our work with UKPN, we only selected attributes for qual testing that were likely to be more confusing or overly technical.

Each description comprised:

- A title
- An outline of the issue
- The current situation
- And what could change with more investment

Participants were asked to review each version to explore if the words made sense and how best to explain each area to customers. The ultimate goal being to make each description as customer friendly and clearly understandable as possible.

The key findings of this report show each of the showcards (the version A & version B for each of the 10 attributes tested) presented to participants along with analysis of how each was received by customers and a recommended revised version that could be used in the WTP survey.

The following 10 attributes were tested in the qualitative research stage:

- Drinking Water Quality
- Risk of 'Do Not Drink' notice
- Water Hardness
- Lead Pipes
- Flooding From Burst Pipes
- Low Water Pressure
- Leakage From Pipes
- Restoring Nature and Wildlife
- Installing Smarter Water Meters
- Customer Service

The following two attributes were not tested in the qualitative research stage as they had been heavily tested by SSC in other studies and were seen to be more familiar or understandable than the 10 that were selected.

- Unplanned short interruptions to water supply
- Risk of hosepipe ban

4. Key findings: attribute descriptions

We start by providing a set of core principles and lessons learnt that could be considered when developing attribute descriptions for the Willingness to Pay survey.

Following this we provide further analysis of views towards each of the stimulus material that were presented to participants.

Following the analysis of each attribute we then provide a recommendation, which is our suggested rephrasing of the attribute for use in the quantitative survey.

4.1 Core principles and lessons learnt

Here we provide a summary of principles that emerged from all of the qualitative research sessions.

It is important to note that across the study there was little difference in opinion amongst those recruited in the qualitative research – household, non-household and vulnerable customers.

Differences in levels of comprehension regarding the attributes and service levels presented were mainly noted at an individual customer level rather than due to the fact they represented a business or were vulnerable in some way.

Although we explained the research was to test comprehension and amend or edit various descriptions, for attributes which resonate strongly with individuals it was sometimes a challenge for certain customers not to immediately express an opinion about the actions being proposed. Therefore, attributes that they have either experienced or have a strong feeling about (e.g. hard water, or poor tasting water and leakage statistics) are aspects they may make quick knee-jerk decisions over, without always digesting the text in full.

When highly emotive or knee jerk reactions to the issues being reviewed occurred, moderators made additional effort to remind customers of the task in hand – to gauge the extent to which the descriptions made sense, and what could change to improve levels of comprehension.

Keep descriptions succinct

Descriptions that used fewer words were preferred overall. Anything that was perceived as 'too long' or 'wordy' made it harder for customers to digest the meaning or sentiment of the description.

Any descriptions which are too wordy are more likely to be 'skim read', so more text does not always equate to the reader having a greater understanding of the issue.

Although on a small number of occasions, where descriptions had been cut more drastically, they could sometimes lose the meaning or appear too blunt.

Examples to convey what any additional investment would pay for were liked and often requested if missing. Examples provided a sense of the types of activities that will actually happen if more money was available. There is a balance to be struck with the number of examples, ideally no more than three, but having something definite and showing what will be done with 'my money' made it much easier or more acceptable, for participants to make a choice.

Any technical phrases can cause confusion or be seen as 'jargon', 'internal' or 'corporate' language, so it is important to think of alternative or lay terms wherever possible.

The use of numbers

Anything that requires a lot of mental processing should be avoided; this could be processing several numbers in a description or being introduced to new areas to think about which they have never previously thought about or knew the water company was involved in.

Different numeric ways of expressing the likelihood or risk of something happening have a considerable impact on perceptions of it happening – very small percentages (e.g. 2% or 0.0003%) are perceived to be much less likely to happen than if it is 38,000 properties, as the latter figure psychologically sounds to be greater.

Ratios feel more relatable to actual people being impacted than percentages, which for many are 'colder' and more remote. Therefore, the choice of how the numbers are expressed is likely to cause differences with regards to perception of the issue.

Where possible, round figures up as much as is feasible. They are easier to mentally digest and comprehend.

In some cases it may be useful or appropriate to use a percentage or ratio with the volume of properties in brackets.

Consumers reject text that seems as if they are being blamed

In certain attributes the fault is put in part on consumers for causing the problems. Respondents did not like when the text is accusatory, finger-wagging or passes the blame onto others.

'Would' rather than 'could'

When shown the 'what could change' section customers tended to prefer statements where the phrase 'would' rather than 'could' was used as it was perceived as more likely to happen. The phrase 'could' evoked feelings of mistrust that the water company may decide not to use any additional money from customers to invest in the things it said it would do. 'Could' was perceived as a get-out clause, whereas as 'would' was more likely seen as a promise, more likely to be kept.

The value of consistency

To aid the mental processing a consistent format should be adopted for all the attribute descriptions; with a similar style of title - be this a factual neutral description or using a verb to convey the aspiration (e.g. reducing or improving).

Having a title, the issue, the current situation and what could change – for all 10 attributes was seen as helpful.

The length of text should ideally be similar across all descriptions. Any with a very long description is likely to put readers off and only be skim read.

Additional observations that may impact WTP scores

The majority of customers appeared to show limited awareness of being supplied by two water companies – it often felt as if they were hearing for the first time that SSC supplied water and another water company (Anglian of Severn Trent) dealt with waste services. This may indicate that comms around this are not cutting though, and/or a general apathy towards it, as most rarely had a reason to take much notice.

There was a sense of a growing level of mistrust towards the intentions of the water company with regards to the purpose of the WTP study, seemingly associated with the cost of living crisis (COLC). As customers become increasingly stretched by inflation and energy bills, they appear to be more likely to question any organisation, water company or another, when asked about topics relating to bills, or potentially 'paying more'. A number of customers in the workshops seemed on edge and easily angered, and generally assumed they would have to pay more for their water bill, even though they were reminded that the purpose of the eventual survey was that customers would have a choice to pay less, the same or more.

When viewing the leakage data, which came as a shock to many, a number of customers felt dismayed that they were being asked to potentially pay more for so many improvements when they perceived the water company to be allowing so much to be wasted through leakage.

The ongoing COLC, continued negative focus of the industry in the media and a genuine shock at the volume of leakage all have the potential to impact WTP scores in 2022. But it's important to note, that these issues are industry wide and are not necessarily unique to SSC.

4.2 Comparisons with Ofwat and CCW report on Common PCs for PR24

As part of this exercise Qa reviewed the insights reported in the Water Consumer Views on Proposed Common Performance Commitments for PR24, conducted by Yonder on behalf of Ofwat and CCW, April 2022.

Much of the overarching insights correlate with those gained from the qual stage of the SSC WTP PR24 study, key comparisons include;

- Customers show preferences or greater concern for attributes that more directly affect them (drinking water quality), are likely to be harmful to health (do not drink, lead pipes) or whereby they perceive provider failure (leakage)
- Very large numbers or very low percentages used to describe service level performance are likely to cause confusion or be rejected
- Large numbers and small percentages likely to lead to customers having to undertake mental arithmetic so can lead to wildly different perceptions of the problem, risk or chance
- Ratios unanimously preferred as a way to read and understand service levels as require less mathematical processing.

4.3 Comprehension of the Attributes

For each of the 10 Attributes tested - two descriptions were shown to customers:

We have highlighted words or phrases in red which participants struggled to comprehend or caused confusion.

Aspects highlighted in green were elements they deemed positive or useful in helping them understand the descriptions.

Aspects shown in purple were the words or phrases where opinions were very mixed.

Underneath each version A & B, we have summarised the key reactions and feedback, before providing a suggested revised version C.

For the purpose of this report we have co-joined South Staffs and Cambridge Water for your reference. In the fieldwork stimulus material, each water company's attributes were referred to as either South Staffs Water or Cambridge Water.

Attribute 1 – version A

Customer service

The issue: Every year tens of thousands of customers contact their water company in a variety of ways (e.g. phone, email, online, letter, or face-to-face) to resolve an issue, ask a question, or access additional services (e.g. a braille bill or seeking financial support to pay their water bills).

Current situation: Currently, the average time that customers calling South Staffs/Cambridge Water must wait to speak to a customer service agent is 2 minutes, and South Staffs Water responds to 60% of customer emails within 24 hours.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could increase investment in its systems, processes and training to improve the customer service and response times offered to its customers.

Analysis:

- Some didn't like 'tens of thousands' as it made it seem as though SSC were receiving a large amount of complaints
- It was not necessary to explain the different ways customers can contact SSC – this was obvious to customers

- While some customers liked the information on 'access additional services (e.g. a braille bill….)', this was more for general interest and reassurance that this help was on offer, rather than actually adding to understanding of the attribute
- 'Customer service' was felt to be easily understood as a concept or phrase and didn't require too much of an explanation
- There were mixed views on the 'average time' metric. It was generally very easy to understand, and therefore favoured by some customers. However, some customers felt this masked the reality of the current situation as it seemed very low, while the 'B' version seemed 'worse', but a more honest representation of the situation
- Response time to emails wasn't deemed necessary as call waiting time was a good enough indication of customer service level, and more familiar to customers
- Generally speaking, customers did not like the phrase 'could' in the body of the 'what could change' text, and would rather a more certain phrase e.g. more investment 'would' mean this. 'Could' seems too vague and customers worry they would pay more for this attribute but improvements might not happen
- 'Systems' and 'processes' were seen as vague and jargonistic, that didn't really explain what would change

Attribute 1 – version B

Improving customer service

The issue: To provide excellent levels of customer service when South Staffs/Cambridge Water customers get in touch. South Staffs/Cambridge Water is rated 3rd out of 17 water & sewerage companies for customer satisfaction in England and Wales**.**

Current situation: Last year, 36.2% of customers contacting South Staffs Water had to wait longer than 10 minutes for their call to be answered.

What could change: Greater investment would mean South Staffs/Cambridge Water can improve the time it takes to respond to customer queries and quality of customer service, through additional staff, training and technology.

Analysis:

- Overall, customers preferred titles that included a positive 'action', such as 'improving', because it more clearly spelled out what the attribute would mean for them as a customer
- Customers pointed out that 'South Staffs/Cambridge Water' was repeated twice in the issue section
- Knowing that SSC was rated '3rd out of 17' companies was useful context for customers, so they could gauge whether the current level of customer service was good or bad in the grand scheme of all water companies
- As a rule, percentages were not favoured unless in a specific context where it makes sense. In this attribute, the percentage, especially with a decimal point, was confusing and not easily digested
- Customers liked the 'longer than 10 minutes' service level descriptor. Despite seeming objectively a 'worse' level of service than version A, which showed the average call wait time, customers felt version B was a more honest representation and were more likely to want see an improvement to this performance
- 'Additional staff, training and technology' was sufficient information to demonstrate to customers what their additional bill payment would be spent on

Attribute 1 – Improved version C (household only)

Customer service

The issue: To provide excellent levels of service when customers get in touch with queries – by phone, email, online, letter, or face-to-face. South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] customer satisfaction is rated 3rd out of all 17 water & sewerage companies in England and Wales.

Current situation: Last year, 1-in-3 customers contacting South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] had to wait longer than 10 minutes for their call to be answered.

What could change: Greater investment would mean South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] can improve response times and quality of customer service, through additional staff, training and use of the latest technology.

Attribute 2 – Risk of temporary "do-not-drink" notice

Attribute 2 – version A

Risk of temporary "do-not-drink notice"

The issue: Very occasionally, your water supply could become contaminated. If this happens, South Staffs/Cambridge Water would send you a notice saying not to drink the tap water or use it to cook or prepare food. A notice of this type would usually be in force for 2-3 days. During this period, tap water could still be used for washing and cleaning. South Staffs Water would provide safe drinking water nearby at temporary water stations which customers could collect and would deliver bottled water directly to vulnerable households.

Current situation: This problem affects around 0.0003% or 1-in-375,000 households per year in your area.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could increase investment to reduce the risk of contamination. For example, it could upgrade water treatment processes, expand its pipe cleaning programme, and use technology to reduce the risk of major bursts or damage (which can cause contamination).

Analysis:

- This attribute required a slightly lengthier explanation as it was unfamiliar to customers and naturally raised some concerns about the safety of drinking water. Therefore, a few reassurances within this attribute would be preferable, so that customers are not too alarmed by the attribute.
- There is a risk that customers may become overly worried by this attribute and contact SSC with concerns. In particular, alarmist language like 'contaminated' should ideally be avoided. A number of customers fixated on the 'contamination' phrase and perceived this as a serious and common issue, without properly digesting the very low risk of this happening. Less emotive language is likely to provide a more balanced perception of the issue
- Some customers felt it was useful to know that tap water could still be used for washing under a 'do not drink' notice. However, on the whole this was seen as useful knowledge to have in the notice itself, but not necessary to understand the attribute itself

- It was important to reassure customers that vulnerable households would be looked after in such a situation, and including this helped reduce the 'knee-jerk' reaction of customers becoming worried over this attribute
- The very small percentage was not well received; it was dismissed and seen as pointless to customers, and left them confused by the contrast of 'the issue' seeming very serious and the 'current situation' showing such a negligible risk. Similarly, the '1 in 375,000' was easier to understand but still seen as extremely small to the point of barely being an issue
- Customers were left confused by being told the chance of this happening 'per year' in version A, but then version B saying it happens once every 80 years. If it doesn't happen every year, then the way the risk is presented in version A seems illogical and misrepresenting the issue

Attribute 2 – version B

Being told to stop drinking tap water

The issue: Sometimes, water companies have to send you a notice saying not to drink the tap water because an issue in the pipe network. Usually this would last about 2-3 days, and provisions will always be made e.g. temporary water stations and bottled water for people who need it.

Current situation: Being issued a 'do not drink' notice is relatively rare, in your area it happens once every 80 years or so. The severity of the incident can vary, and anywhere from 2 to 320,000 properties could be affected.

What could change: More investment in pipe cleaning, water treatment processes and technology would all help reduce the chance of customers having to stop drinking tap water.

Analysis:

- Customers did not like the title and phrasing 'being told to stop drinking tap water' as it felt patronising and slightly childish, as if being 'told off'
- The word 'sometimes' caused some to feel more alarm than others, as it made it seem like a more common issue than in reality, although this varied based on how customers interpreted the words 'sometimes' and 'occasionally' which was the word used in version A

- The issue section of version B was well received. Customers fed back that it was clear, explained the issue in a succinct way while still providing reassurances and not being too alarmist
- Customers preferred to know that the 'do not drink' notice was rare and only happened once every 80 years. This was easier to comprehend. It still felt like a very small risk, but was perceived to be more accurate in terms of how often this issue may occur or how much they should worry about it
- Generally speaking, customers did not digest the sentence that explained how the severity of the incident could vary, from 2 to 320,000 properties affected. The numbers were off-putting, the huge variance was hard to comprehend, and customers admitted to not reading this sentence. Overall it detracted from customer understanding and should be removed
- Explaining that more investment in 'pipe cleaning, water treatment processes and technology' would improve this issue, was clear and easy to understand. Customers didn't need more detailed information as most felt it would be too technical to make much sense to them, and all customers needed to know was that their investment would reduce the risk of a 'do not drink' notice

Suggested revised version C

Risk of a temporary "do not drink" notice

The issue: Occasionally, water companies have to send customers a notice saying not to drink the tap water because of an issue with the water quality. Usually this would last about 2-3 days, and South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] would provide safe drinking water near your property at temporary water stations and would deliver bottled water directly to vulnerable households.

Current situation: Last year, 2 properties were issued a 'do not drink' notice in the South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] area.

What could change: More investment in pipe cleaning and upgrading water treatment processes to use the latest technology would all help to reduce the chance of a 'do not drink' notice happening.

Attribute 3 – Using technology to manage demand for water

Attribute 3 – version A

Using technology to manage demand for water

The issue: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could use technology including smart water meters, which allow automated readings to be taken by the company, to better understand and manage demand for water in its network. This technology will also allow South Staffs/Cambridge Water to identify leaks more quickly, provide new tariffs to encourage customers to use less water, and help customers make more informed decisions about water use by providing them with more information about when and where they use water.

Current situation: 24% of properties have a meter that could operate in smart meter mode, although currently they do not operate as in smart meter mode (South Staffs Water currently takes only manual readings from these meters, which it does twice a year).

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could install more meters across the network in household and business properties, to better understand and manage demand for water on the network. South Staffs/Cambridge Water could invest in central technology to allow existing and new meters to operate as smart meters, which would provide automatic readings to the company on a monthly basis.

Analysis:

- The title 'using technology to manage demand for water' did not make much sense to customers. It was felt not to be fairly descriptive of the issue, used industry jargon and was vague
- On the whole, this attribute description was far too long and many customers admitted to skim reading it or not being able to get through it easily
- Phrases such as 'manage demand for water in its network' are not customer friendly and are off-putting, preventing customers from fully understanding the meaning of the issue
- The description of the issue was too long and detailed in this version of the attribute and should be reduced. All participants felt they needed to know was briefly why smart meters are helpful to SSC and customers

- There were mixed views on percentages, but on the whole 24% was easy to understand as it was a full number, a 'familiar' percentage that people easily understood as a quarter, and in this case customers didn't need to understand the scale of how many meters there were overall
- The description of the 'current situation' was clear, customers could easily understand that a quarter of meters could operate as smart meters but were not currently. It was seen as important context and explanation that the meters are read manually twice a year, as customers can then clearly understand what the impact of automatic meter readings would be

Attribute 3 – version B

Installing smarter water meters

The issue: South Staffs/Cambridge Water needs to understand and manage demand for water in its network to ensure there is enough water for the future. 'Smart' water meters automatically send regular readings to the water company and customers. Smart meters help South Staffs/Cambridge Water to identify leaks more quickly, and help customers to use less water.

Current situation: The water meters in 1-in-4 properties in the South Staffs/Cambridge Water area could operate as a smart meter, but currently these are still read manually.

What could change: Investing in installing more smart water meters, and the technology to turn existing meters into smart meters, could reduce water consumption and bills (through customers being more well-informed) and reduce water wastage (through detecting leaks quicker).

Analysis:

- The title made much more sense to customers than version A as it was more descriptive of what the attribute actually was and what the increased bill would go towards
- The phrase 'smart meter' is a reasonably familiar concept due to the push for smart energy meters to be installed in households in recent years. Therefore it does not need a long explanation about what it is and what the benefits are; customers tend to be aware that smart meters provide automated readings and encourage more mindful use of supply

- Customers were highly attuned to the issue of 'ensuring there is enough water for the future'. This was partly due to the media coverage of current water shortages at the time of fieldwork. Customers felt this should be included as it clearly explains why SSC needs to more closely monitor water use and why customers need to be more informed about their own usage
- The essential information to include in the issue is that smart meters help SSC identify leaks and customers to save water
- '1 in 4' properties was an acceptable way of describing the risk and easy to understand
- Customers generally did not like vague references to 'technology', and in particular didn't feel it was necessary in this context. It was enough to say that SSC could invest in converting meters to smart meters
- The additional information provided in brackets, explaining how smart meters could help, was interesting and useful for some customers. However, most felt this was already covered in 'the issue' and did not need this spelling out again. It was preferable to remove brackets and have less text to read

Suggested revised version C

Installing 'smart' water meters

The issue: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] needs to carefully manage demand for water to ensure there is enough for the future. 'Smart' water meters automatically send regular readings. Having more information helps the water company and customers to understand where and when water is being used, or lost to leaks.

Current situation: 24% of properties have a meter that could operate in smart meter mode, although currently they do not operate as a smart meter as the technology to take the readings is not in place yet. South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] currently takes manual readings once [twice] a year.

What could change: Investing in installing more smart water meters and converting existing meters into smart meters. The smart meters would help flag issues to reduce water wasted from undetected leaks and would give customers regular updates on their water consumption to help them find ways to use less.

Attribute 4 – Water Hardness

Attribute 4 – version A

Water hardness

The issue: South Staffs/Cambridge Water customers sometimes experience the impacts of having a hard water supply, which is caused by naturally occurring minerals in the water. Hard water can lead to limescale forming on taps, appliances and surfaces like tiles, meaning they often need to be replaced more frequently. Hard water is not damaging to human health (in fact, it can have health benefits due to the higher mineral content). Hard water can be softened to reduce damage caused by limescale, but this can alter the taste of the water.

Current situation: South Staffs/Cambridge Water does not invest in water softening.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could provide a contribution towards the cost of fitting a water softening device in some customers' properties who are worst impacted by water hardness and the on-going maintenance of the devices, but a separate tap supply would still be needed for any drinking water. Alternatively, South Staffs/Cambridge Water could make a large investment to build, operate and maintain a water softening treatment works to soften the whole water supply.

Analysis:

- 'Hard water' was an instantly recognisable phrase to customers and did not need much explanation. Customers were aware of what limescale is and where it forms, and tended not to need this to be spelled out
- There were generally quite strong opinions about the hardness of the water which sometimes drew customers towards this issue more than other attributes
- It was comforting to customers to know that hard water is not harmful to health and helps them contextualise how serious an issue this is, however it is not necessary to be told about health benefits and most customers skimmed over this point as they knew what hard water is and skipped to the next section
- The current situation was seen as too blunt, although some customers liked that it was direct and to the point

- The 'what could change' section was not clearly understood. It was too long to digest, and customers could not explain back what the options for water softening were, without re-reading the attribute several times
- There was too much information provided about water softening devices, their maintenance and tap supply. This only served to confuse customers and detracted from the issue itself and what changes investment would bring.

Attribute 4 – version B

Softening water supply

The issue: South Staffs/Cambridge Water has a hard water supply. Hard water is not harmful to human health, but it can lead to limescale damage on taps and appliances.

Current situation: Hard water can be softened to reduce damage caused by limescale, but this can alter the taste of the water. South Staffs/Cambridge Water does not currently invest in water softening.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could either 1) contribute to the cost of water softening devices in customers' homes; or 2) soften the whole water supply through a large investment in a treatment works.

Analysis:

- Overall, version B was strongly preferred. Feedback showed it was a good length, sentences were clear and to the point, with no unnecessary text or detail
- Customers liked that the title mentioned 'softening' the water, as this is what they might be paying for, however lots of customers were drawn to the phrase 'hard water' as it was relatable to their experience. This could be added to the title to better illustrate that the attribute focuses on the hardness of the water supply
- Customers felt they needed to know that softening would alter the taste, as it would affect whether or not they were willing to pay for this to happen
- On balance splitting the 'what could change' section into a 1) and 2) worked well for this attribute as two very different options were available, and this helped to break it down clearly which helped with customer comprehension

Suggested revised version C

Hard water supply

The issue: South Staffs/Cambridge Water has a hard water supply. Hard water is not harmful to human health, but it can lead to limescale damage on taps, showerheads and appliances (e.g. washing machines).

Current situation: Hard water can be softened to reduce damage caused by limescale, but this can alter the taste of the water. South Staffs/Cambridge Water does not currently invest in water softening.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could either 1) contribute to the cost of installing water softening devices in customers' homes; or 2) soften the whole water supply through a large investment in building, running and maintaining a new treatment works.

Attribute 5 – Lead pipes

Attribute 5 – version A

Lead pipes

The issue: Some properties in your area are served by a lead supply pipe, most of which are owned by the customer and not your water company. This is the supply pipe that connects the customers' internal plumbing the water mains. South Staffs Water adds a harmless additive to the water supply to ensure the lead pipe poses no risk to health under normal circumstances. However, if a lead pipe gets badly damaged in some way, or the taps are not run for an extended period of time, then the level of lead in the water can increase and potentially pose a health risk to people drinking the tap water at the property.

Current situation: Currently 26% of properties in your area are served by a lead supply pipe, and South Staffs/Cambridge Water expect to replace enough pipes to bring this down to 24% by the end of 2030.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could invest to replace lead pipes more quickly in properties in your area.

Analysis:

- Some customers became confused and frustrated by the explanation of who owns the lead pipes, and specifically what a supply pipe was. This was too much technical information too early on in the attribute causing customers to switch off, unable to process it, or not reading to the end of the attribute
- Some customers felt as if SSC were passing the blame onto customers and shifting responsibility for the lead pipes, which left some feeling overly negative towards this attribute. It also left them confused as to whether the pipes being replaced were customer-owned, and if so do customers pay for this themselves or does SSC? Customers assumed pipe work on their property has to be paid for by the customer, and this confusion was derailing, ultimately preventing customers from properly understanding this attribute
- Customers did not like the word 'additive' as it made them feel as if unnatural chemicals are in their water supply. 'Treating' the water (from version B) felt less alarming and less likely to worry customers
- The current situation did not land well with customers, as most worked out that only 2% of pipes were being replaced in the next 8 years which seemed extremely low. Customers also didn't like the way this was being presented as it forced the customer to do mental maths in order to make sense of it
- The word 'quickly' was simple and easy to understand for some customers, but others rejected it as the service level actually refers to the number of pipes replaced rather than the speed, and this mixed up the two measures

Attribute 5 – version B

Replacing lead pipes

The issue: Currently, 1-in-4 of properties in your area are served by a lead supply pipe. South Staffs Water treats the water supply to ensure lead levels in the water are safe, but there are some circumstances where lead levels can rise and pose a health risk e.g. if lead pipes are badly damaged.

Current situation: South Staffs Water currently replace 1000 lead supply pipes a year.

What could change: South Staffs Water could invest to replace a greater number of lead pipes each year. This would reduce the number of properties served by a lead supply pipe and therefore reduce the chance of lead affecting customers' water supply.

Analysis:

- As with other attributes, the title with a positive action that describes what the change in bill would achieve, in this case 'replacing lead pipes' was clearer and simple
- 'The issue' was clear enough without being overly descriptive or alarmist. It stated the prevalence of lead pipes in a simple format (1 in 4), reassured that water is treated and safe, and gave a short example of why lead pipes can cause issues
- Replacing 1000 lead pipes a year seemed quite low to customers, but on the whole was a better descriptor of the current situation as it was a simple fact and an easy number to process. Some wanted more context e.g. the total number of lead pipes so they could assess how good/bad 1,000 is, but others felt this might be too high a number, be alarming or misleading
- One source of confusion was whether lead pipe replacement was random or targeted. After learning that only the damaged pipes cause issues, customers wanted to know if the replacement schemes focus on older, damaged or 'at risk' pipes. If so, replacing 1000 pipes would be seen as more acceptable than if it were randomly replacing lead pipes regardless of if they were likely to cause an issue or not
- 'Greater number' could be replaced by 'more', to use more simple language
- In this instance, it was useful for comprehension to include the final sentence of 'what could change', which spelled out to customers that fewer lead pipes mean lower risk of lead affecting water supply

Suggested revised version C

Lead pipes

The issue: Some properties in your area are served by a lead supply pipe. Most of these pipes are owned by the customer and not your water company. South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] treats the water supply to ensure lead levels in the water are safe, but there are some circumstances where it can become unsafe e.g. if lead pipes are badly damaged. Over time, lead exposure can be damaging to health.

Current situation: Currently, just over 1-in-4 properties in your area are served by a lead supply pipe. South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] currently replace 1,000 lead supply pipes a

What could change: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] could employ additional teams to remove more lead pipes each year. This would reduce the chance of lead affecting customers' water supply.

Attribute 6 – Leakage from pipes

Attribute 6 – version A

Leakage from pipes

The issue: Every year, leaking pipes cause a certain amount of treated water to be lost from the network. The majority of leakage (70%) comes from the South Staffs Water pipe network and the rest (30%) leaks from pipes on customer properties (which are the customer's responsibility). As new leaks are always appearing, they can't be eliminated entirely.

Current situation: 20% of the treated water that enters the South Staffs/Cambridge Water network is lost to leakage every day. That's the same as 26 Olympic sized swimming pools.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water invests to limit the level of leakage to the extent necessary to minimise wastage and keep customers' bills affordable. The company could increase investment to reduce leakage further through initiatives like fitting more smart sensors to identify and fix pipes before leaks occur, using more satellites to detect leaks, and using innovative pipe materials that are less prone to leaking.

Analysis:

- Some felt it was important to use the word 'pipes' in the title as this made it clear where the water is leaking from. Ideally the word 'water' would also be used in the title to avoid misattribution to sewage pipes – as customers are not always aware that SSC only provide clean water
- Some confusion over 'every year' as later in the attribute it says 'every day', better to keep this consistent
- Some mixed views on whether it is useful or confusing to know that 70% of leakage comes from SSC and 30% from customers – ultimately it became clear that the percentages did more harm than good. Those who struggled with percentages immediately switched off and became confused, and those who found it interesting admitted that it didn't actually add much to their understanding of the topic or service level
- Customers generally did not like being told that leakage was their responsibility as it felt that SSC were avoiding their own share. This bracketed portion is best removed as customers are mostly aware that pipes on their properties are their responsibility, but didn't like it being spelled out in this way and immediately had a negative viewpoint towards the attribute.
- Some customers thought it was good context to spell out that leaks cannot be eliminated entirely, while others felt it was obvious and unnecessary
- Olympic sized swimming pools was instantly evocative and helped customers visualise the volume
- There was a lot of confusion and fixation on the balance of keeping bills affordable while minimising leaks. Customers focused on the words 'affordable bills' and this sometimes distracted from what the attribute is actually about

Attribute 6 – version B

Reducing water lost to leakage

The issue: Every day, 65 million litres of treated water are lost to leakage from the South Staffs Water pipe network. The majority of leaks are from South Staffs Water pipes and the rest are from customer pipes.

Current situation: South Staffs Water tries to balance fixing leaks to minimise wastage while keeping customers' bills affordable, but 20% of water entering the pipe network is still currently lost to leakage.

What could change: Increased investment would mean better use of technologies that predict and detect leaks, and using pipe materials that are less prone to leaking. This would mean less water is lost to leakage.

Analysis:

- Again, a positive action statement was preferred for the title
- '65 million litres' was too great a volume for customers to meaningfully comprehend. It felt like a lot, but was difficult to get a sense of scale and 'Olympic sized swimming pools' in version A was far more relatable
- Once again, customers were distracted by the mention of affordable bills, they focused on this and didn't always fully digest the attribute. Some misinterpreted it, claiming that this attribute was important to them because they wanted affordable bills
- 20% of water being lost to leakage - while a shocking statistic and causing many to feel miffed and angered by this reality - was accurate and informative, and a simple percentage for people to comprehend
- The 'what could change' section was simple and to the point, and in this situation customers didn't feel they needed long descriptions of the types of technology that would reduce leakage

Suggested revised version C

Water lost to leakage from pipes

The issue: Every day, treated water is lost to leakage from the South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] pipe network as pipes age or are damaged. The majority of the water lost to leaks are from the water company's pipes (70%) and the rest are from customer pipes. The company aims to fix the largest and most disruptive leaks first.

Current situation: 20% [16%] of the treated water that enters the South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] network is lost to leakage every day – this is the same as the national average [which is less than the national average] of 20%. That's the same as 26 [5] Olympic sized swimming pools.

What could change: Increased investment would mean a larger team fixing pipes, using innovative technologies that detect leaks before they happen, for example by fitting sensors throughout the pipe network, and using pipe materials that are less prone to leaking. This would mean less water would be lost to leakage.

Attribute 7 – Issues with water colour, taste, or smell of tap water

Attribute 7 – version A

Issues with water colour, taste, or smell of tap water

The issue: Every year some customers will experience an unexpected change in the colour (normally light brown) and/or the taste or smell of their water supply (normally a chlorine smell). The water is safe to drink and can be used for bathing and in washing machines and dishwashers. The change normally lasts for around 24 hours and could happen at any time.

Current situation: This problem affects around 3.8% or 1-in-25 properties per year in the South Staffs/Cambridge Water area.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could increase investment in its water treatment works, including upgrading to more modern water treatment processes to reduce the use of chemicals to treat the water, further expand its pipe cleaning programme to remove any sediment build up in pipes and using technology to reduce pressure bursts which can cause the tap water to become discoloured.

Analysis:

- Customers preferred that the title mention 'colour, taste or smell' as it was specific and descriptive. The title should include a positive action in line with other attributes e.g. 'reducing'
- Largely speaking, customers liked to be aware of the types of change in water that they could expect. This helped them to visualise the issue and understand that the attribute referred to specific changes and not general water quality
- It was important to be reassured that the water is safe to drink, otherwise the description may be alarming and worry or distract some customers.
- Consistent with other attributes, the small percentage with a decimal point (3.8%) did not land well with customers. It was hard to visualise, there was no sense of scale and the decimal point was off-putting
- 1-in-25 was a very easily relatable figure and was well-received by customers, however customers did point out that they needed a sense of scale – how many customers does this actually affect?
- Some customers did not like reference to 'sediment build up' in pipes as it was overly detailed and unpleasant to think of

Attribute 7 – version B

Drinking water quality

The issue: Every year, some South Staffs/Cambridge Water customers experience issues with the look, taste or smell of their tap water. The water is still safe to drink.

Current situation: 22,844 households reported issues with drinking water quality per year in the South Staffs/Cambridge Water area.

What could change: More investment, for example, in modernising water treatment processes or expanding pipe cleaning would help reduce the number of times customers experience this issue.

Analysis:

- The phrase 'drinking water quality' is too ambiguous and open to interpretation, and customers made different assumptions about what 'quality' meant. For some, this meant the general safety of water, while others thought it meant the taste. Neither of these interpretations reflect the reality of the attribute
- Many customers preferred 'the issue' description here as it was shorter, simpler and easy to digest. However some felt it needed further clarification on what the change in look, taste or smell was, so they were able to pinpoint exactly what the attribute referred to – a specific, temporary change. This prevented customers from misunderstanding the attribute as general quality of water
- In addition to this, customers felt it should be clearer that the attribute referred to a temporary change in water rather than general issues with water quality/taste/look/smell
- The 'what could change' section was clear and succinct

Suggested revised version C

Issues with tap water colour, taste, or smell

The issue: Every year, some South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] customers suddenly experience a temporary issue with the look, taste or smell of their tap water. The water is still safe to drink. The most common issues are the water turning a light brown colour or a chlorine smell, typically lasting up to 24 hours.

Current situation: Around 23,000 properties report issues with drinking water per year in the South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] area, that's 1-in-25 properties.

What could change: More investment in modernising water treatment processes, expanding the pipe renewal and cleaning programme and installing modern technology would help reduce the number of properties that experience these issues.

Attribute 8 – Flooding from a burst pipe

Attribute 8 – version A

Flooding from a burst pipe

The issue: Sometimes the pipe supplying water to a customer's property can burst and cause flooding of the ground floor of the property. When this happens, customers can claim against South Staffs/Cambridge Water's insurance to get their property put back as it was. On average it takes one month for the property to be put back as it was.

Current situation: Currently, 1-in-11,905 or 0.0084% of properties in your area experience this sort of flooding due to a burst pipe each year.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could increase investment in pipe replacement schemes to reduce the number of bursts and invest more in new technology that allows it to spot more bursts before they happen.

Analysis:

- There were mixed views on the sentence explaining that customers can claim against SSC's insurance. Many felt it was reassuring and 'good to know' that they would not have to pay for damage. Others felt this was

obvious that water damage would be covered. For others still, it raised more questions about the process of claiming and distracted from the attribute. Ultimately, the final wording needs to consider whether including this information actually adds to understanding, or distracts from it. There is a possibility that including it makes the issue seem less severe, because the cost of damages would be covered, therefore eliciting lower WTP. However there is also an argument that the distress of a flooded property still seems severe even if the cost is covered, and WTP would not be impacted. We suggest including this but testing explicitly in the cognitive testing

- Knowing how long it would take to put properties back as they were, tended not to help or be necessary for customer understanding
- Once again, small decimal percentages are not meaningful or understood by customers, and such a small risk was easily dismissed as not important
- Similarly, the 1-in-11,905 was seen as far too small to be taken seriously by customers, despite being slightly easier to digest than the percentage
- Customers did not understand how bursts could be spotted 'before they happen' and would rather this was re-worded

Attribute 8 – version B

Reducing chance of property flooding from a burst pipe

The issue: Sometimes the pipe supplying water to a customer's property can burst and flood the ground floor of their home or business.

Current situation: Currently, 63 properties per year experience flooding due to a burst pipe. South Staffs/Cambridge Water replaces 20km pipes a year as part of pipe replacement schemes.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could invest more in replacing pipes quicker and invest in new technology to identify burst pipes earlier.

Analysis:

- Although more wordy, customers preferred the title of version B as it mentioned 'reducing' as well as clarifying it was about property flooding rather than in the street or elsewhere

- Overall, customers preferred to know the exact number of properties affected. Some requested to know what this was out of to give a sense of scale, but there is a risk that this will appear very small and be dismissed. The scale of the issue (i.e. a very small chance) clashed with the personal impact of a burst pipe (i.e. very disruptive and upsetting), therefore there is a risk that displaying the chance as very small does not reflect the severity of this issue
- It was confusing and not necessary to see the 20km of pipes replaced per year. Customers simply preferred to know how many properties are affected, be told how it will be improved, and what it means for the risk of it happening
- Customers felt it may be helpful to include a final sentence spelling out that investment would reduce the number of properties affected, making clear the benefit to customers

Suggested revised version C

Chance of property flooding from a burst pipe

The issue: Sometimes the main water supply pipe owned by the water company can burst and flood the ground floor of a customer's home or business. When this happens, South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] cover the cost of the repair through their insurance to get the property put back as it was.

Current situation: Currently, 63 properties per year in the South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] area experience flooding due to a burst pipe.

What could change: More investment would enable South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] to employ more teams to replace pipes quicker and invest in new technology (e.g. sensors) to predict pipes that should be replaced before they burst. This would reduce the number of properties that experience flooding.

Attribute 9 – Low water pressure

Attribute 9 – version A

Low water pressure

The issue: Properties may experience short periods of low water pressure (up to 6 hours), meaning that it takes longer to fill a kettle, sink, or bath and a shower would be weak. This typically happens without warning and is caused by problems in the network (such as a leak or burst pipe or a pumping station failing).

Current situation: Every year, 1-in-13 properties served by South Staffs/Cambridge Water experience a period of low water pressure**.**

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could increase investment in the network to reduce the risk of problems that cause short periods of low water pressure.

Analysis:

- 'Low water pressure' is another very easily understood concept, familiar to customers and requires minimal explanation. It does not need to spell out how long it takes to fill a kettle, sink, bath etc
- While some customers found it interesting to learn why low water pressure happens, most agreed that this was not needed to describe the attribute for the purposes of the survey
- Customers felt they needed to know that the attribute referred to a temporary change in water pressure, e.g. up to 6 hours
- As with many of the other attributes, the ratio 1-in-13 was easy to visualise and relate to. Some customers wished to gain a sense of scale in terms of how many customers this affected, but this wasn't as essential as other attributes
- Customers found it helpful that the 'what could change' section spelled out how they would benefit from investment in a short and succinct way

Attribute 9 – version B

Improving low water pressure

The issue: Every year some households experience problems with the force and volume that water comes out of their taps. When water pressure is low, it comes out of the tap as a trickle.

Current situation: Over the course of any one year 7% of South Staffs/Cambridge Water customers experience low water pressure.

What could change: More investment would allow South Staffs/Cambridge Water to invest more in the infrastructure and network which will help reduce the chance of problems (e.g. burst pipes) that cause short periods of low water pressure.

Analysis:

- Customers preferred the positive title of 'improving' low water pressure
- As mentioned above, low water pressure did not need explaining much, but customers thought version B needed to mention that this attribute was about temporary periods of low pressure rather than general issues
- The word 'trickle' was seen as misleading and subjective, as customers noted times they experienced low water pressure was more than a trickle
- As a general rule, percentages were not favoured by customers
- In version B, the 'what could change' section expanded unnecessarily while not adding much meaning

Suggested revised version C

Low water pressure

The issue: Every year some properties experience temporary periods of low water pressure, normally lasting less than 6 hours. These periods of low pressure are usually caused by problems with the pipe network.

Current situation:, 1-in-13 properties served by South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] experience a short period of low water pressure every year.

What could change: Increased investment by South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] to replace and lay new pipes and update other equipment in the network quicker would reduce the risk of problems that cause short periods of low water pressure.

Attribute 10 – Biodiversity

Attribute 10 – version A

Biodiversity

The issue: South Staffs/Cambridge Water has a legal duty to protect and improve areas for wildlife and plants across the areas it serves. This includes making sure that the water environments (rivers, streams, and reservoirs) are healthy, with natural water levels and also working with land owners and farmers to prevent run-off pollution that may damage the water environment.

Current situation: South Staffs/Cambridge Water currently protects and restores 542 hectares (approximately the same size as 760 football pitches).

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could increase investment to restore biodiversity (i.e. plants and wildlife) within the water environments across the region and widen its programmes to partner with more land owners and farmers to reduce pollution run off and protect and restore more areas of land for native wildlife.

Analysis:

- Overall, version A of this attribute is was seen to be full of jargon and too long for customers to take meaning from
- 'Biodiversity' was not a familiar word. Customers did not like or understand the word, with many being put off reading or taking meaning from the attribute because of this perceived industry jargon
- Customers liked that this version mentioned a 'legal' duty as it gave important context to the issue and how seriously it is taken
- As a general rule, customers did not like information in brackets, finding it awkward to read and adding unnecessary detail
- 'Water environments' is not a common phrase, so needs either explaining or removing
- 'Hectares' is an unfamiliar word to customers. While some may not be able to visualise the size of 'acres', it is a much more familiar word and one that would not put them off reading, so we suggest switching to acres
- 'Football pitches' is a clear and easily visualised way of describing large areas of land and was welcomed by customers

- The word 'programmes' was seen as vague and corporate, and either needed to be explained or be removed. On balance, customers were happy for this to be removed

Attribute 10 – version B

Restoring nature and supporting wildlife

The issue: South Staffs/Cambridge Water has a duty to protect nature and wildlife, and ensure there is no permanent damage to the land and water environments where they operate.

Current situation: South Staffs/Cambridge Water work to ensure rivers, streams, and reservoirs are healthy and also work with land owners and farmers to prevent run-off pollution. Currently they protect and restore just over 2 square miles.

What could change: More investment would allow South Staffs/Cambridge Water to protect and restore the biodiversity of more land and water environments.

Analysis:

- The title of version B was preferred, but customers were unsure of the word 'restoring', feeling that it didn't quite reflect the attribute.
- 'Square miles' was not easy to picture as this area was too big, and customers felt it would not all be in one place so didn't make sense to evoke the idea of a large square area
- Again, remove the phrase 'biodiversity' and replace with 'plants and wildlife', as the word biodiversity can be alienating and confusing

Suggested revised version C

Supporting nature and wildlife

The issue: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] has a legal duty to protect and enhance nature and wildlife, and ensure there is no permanent damage to the areas where they operate. The company aims to ensure rivers, [chalk] streams, reservoirs and underground water stores are healthy.

Current situation:. South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] currently protects and enhances 1,300 acres of land in its supply area. This is equivalent to approximately 760 football pitches.

What could change: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] would increase investment in programmes focused on nature and wildlife. This includes partnering with more landowners and farmers to reduce pollution and protect and enhance more areas of land and water. For example, by creating wetlands or meadows for native wildlife.

Attribute 11 - unplanned short interruptions to water supply

Attribute 11 - version A

Unplanned short interruptions to water supply

The issue: Every year some customers will experience a short interruption to their property's water supply, where it suddenly stops working without warning for 3-6 hours. During this type of interruption, South Staffs/Cambridge Water would deliver bottled water directly to the homes of vulnerable people.

Current situation: Last year, 1-in-174 properties in the South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] area experienced a short interruption to their water supply.

What could change:
More investment would enable South Staffs/Cambridge Water to employ more teams to replace older and damaged pipes quicker, increase the pump maintenance programme and invest in new technology (e.g. sensors) to identify pipe bursts before they happen.

Suggested revised version C

Unplanned short interruptions to water supply

The issue: Every year some customers will experience a short interruption to their property's water supply, where it suddenly stops working without warning for 3-6 hours. During this type of interruption, South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] would deliver bottled water directly to the homes of vulnerable people.

Current situation: Last year, 1-in-174 properties in the South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] area experienced a short interruption to their water supply.

What could change:
More investment would enable South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] to employ more teams to replace older and damaged pipes quicker and increase the pump and water treatment works maintenance programme.

Attribute 12 - risk of temporary use ban, including hosepipes

Attribute 12 - version A

Risk of temporary use ban, including hosepipes

The issue: To protect essential water supplies during extended periods of dry weather, South Staffs/Cambridge Water may send you a notice saying you must not use a hosepipe or sprinkler, or use water for other non-essential uses (such as filling paddling pools). The length of temporary use bans can vary, but are usually issued for five months, between May and September.

Current situation: South Staffs Water's/Cambridge Water's current service level is to bring in a temporary use ban once every 40 [20] years. The last temporary use ban in this region was in 1976/1991-92.

What could change: South Staffs/Cambridge Water could invest more to find new sources of water, reduce wastage and customer demand for water to make the water supply more resilient to a changing climate and population growth. For example, by further reducing leakage, extending an existing reservoir/investing in in a new reservoir, or installing more underground pipes to transfer water more effectively around the region to where demand for water is highest.

Suggested revised version C (household)

Risk of temporary use ban, including hosepipes

The issue: To protect essential water supplies during extended periods of dry weather, South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] may send you a notice saying you must not use a hosepipe or sprinkler, or use water for other non-essential uses. The length of temporary use bans can vary, but are usually issued for five months, between May and September.

Current situation: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] currently plan for the potential need to bring in a temporary use ban once every 40 [20] years. The last temporary use ban in this region was in 1976 [1991-92].

What could change: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] could invest more to make the water supply more resilient to a changing climate and population growth. For example, by further reducing leakage, extending an existing reservoir [investing in a new reservoir] or installing more underground pipes that better transfer water around the region to where demand is highest.

Suggested revised version C (non-household)

Non-essential water use ban

The issue: To protect essential water supplies during extended periods of dry weather, South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] may send your business a notice saying you must not use water for non-essential uses – such as cleaning windows or vans/cars or watering any grounds using a hosepipe or sprinkler. The length of the ban can vary, but are usually issued for five months, between May and September.

Current situation: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] currently plan for the potential need to bring in a temporary use ban once every 80 [50] years. The last temporary use ban in this region was in 1976 [1991-92].

What could change: South Staffs Water [Cambridge Water] could invest more to make the water supply more resilient to a changing climate and population growth. For example, by further reducing leakage, extending an existing reservoir [investing in in a new reservoir] or installing more underground pipes that transfer water around the region where demand is highest.

4.4 Prioritisation exercise

Customers had mixed opinions over which of the investment areas should be a key priority.

Drinking water quality was more frequently selected as the most important area to invest in. This was due to perceived concerns around health and that it was the main thing they were paying SSC to provide. Drinking water is expected to be clean, safe and of the highest standards possible and more often than not, supersedes other attributes.

Leakage from pipes was also high on the list of preferences. This was particularly driven by the scale of the problem, which came as a surprise to the vast majority. Reactions to the issue were also intensified due the recent heatwave in the summer of 2022 and discontent that the water company hadn't already done more to improve the situation. It was also a topic whereby customers sometimes struggled to see why they should pay more to fix the problem when the fault was seen to lie with the water company.

Lead pipes and 'do not drink' notice sometimes neared the top end of priorities, again because they were a public health hazard. But as the incidents were relatively small (in comparison to leakage volumes) they were not seen as essential or top priorities.

Flooding from pipes, low pressure and water hardness were less likely to feature in customers' top tier of priorities. This again was because they did not seem as critical to public health as was associated with DWQ, or the scale of the leakage problem.

Customer service and restoring nature and wildlife varied in preference, but rarely reached the top three preferences. Customer service was more likely to be selected if someone had experienced a problem and was able to assess how frustrating it might be to wait too long for the issue to be resolved. Nature and wildlife, whilst important in principle, were not seen as directly impacting customers in the same way as most of the other attributes.

Installing smart meters was more likely to be seen as least important. Mostly because the 'issue' associated with it didn't illustrate anything that could be harmful to customers or suggest a scale that was perceived as far worse than they had expected (as with leakage).

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