

Portsmouth Water – Research Among Vulnerable Customers Discussion Guide v3.2 – 28/07/2022

Summary of approach

Blue Marble will be conducting 18 x 45-minute interviews with vulnerable Portsmouth Water customers.

About this discussion guide:

We will use the discussion guide flexibly, to structure the conversations and as a prompt for potentially useful lines of questioning rather than as a script for all interviews to follow.

Our senior research team will use their understanding of the research objectives and their expertise of exploring respondents' views to depart from the discussion guide plan where necessary.

Introduction to Blue Marble and the project – moderator to introduce themselves. My name is [____], from Blue Marble Research, an independent market research agency. We are conducting this research on behalf of Portsmouth Water, who would like your input into their long-term planning.

Blue Marble is independent market research agency, we abide by Market Research Society code of conduct. Research is confidential, so your name won't appear anywhere in the report or be shared with client. I will be recording session for internal use and analysis but this

will not be shared with anyone. **START RECORDING**

Introduction – Background and Respondent's Life Circumstances (c.5 mins)

- To get things started, I wanted to find out a little bit about you and your household. Please tell me a bit about yourself? **[PROMPT IF NECESSARY:]**
 - Where do you live?
 - Who do you live with?
 - Occupation?
 - Interests / hobbies?

ASK IF ON GOING HEALTH ISSUE

- Thanks for letting me get to know you a bit better. I understand from the recruiters that you have some on-going health issues (physical or mental) – I was wondering if you could tell me a little more about this?
- How have the last 12 months been for you and your household? What have been the key highs and lows?
 - Briefly, how would you describe life for you and your household at the moment?
 - Partner job
 -

- Are you currently (or have you in the past been) in touch with any organisations or charities to receive help with your current situation/on going health issue?

Experiences of utilities, incl. Portsmouth Water (c.10 mins)

I want to talk about customer service, specifically from utility providers. Have a think about what excellent customer service looks like from a utility provider.

- What does it look like? Explain what you'd expect from them if they were providing excellent customer service.
- Do you have any examples to share of a time you've received excellent customer service from a utility provider?
- We talked about your circumstances earlier, can you recall a time where a company responded particularly well to accommodate your situation? [IF NOT, PROMPT HOW THEY WOULD WANT COMPANY TO INTERACT WITH THEM TO ACCOUNT FOR THEIR HEALTH ISSUE/CIRCUMSTANCE]

As mentioned earlier, we are running this project on behalf of Portsmouth Water. Portsmouth Water are the company who provide water to your home (NOTE: they are not the company that take sewage away from your home, they only provide clean water).

- Briefly tell us what you know about Portsmouth Water.
- What are your overall impressions of Portsmouth Water and what they are like as a company?
- What do they do well?/ What are your expectations of Portsmouth Water as your water provider
- What do they not do so well?
- Is there anything they can do to improve overall?
- Do you have any feedback on how Portsmouth Water deal with or communicate with you? e.g. in relation to bills [PROMPT IF NECESSARY]

Portsmouth Water's future priorities (c.15 mins)

Like other water companies in the UK, Portsmouth Water submits a business plan every 5 years as part of a 25-year forecast. This provides a plan for what it will do – including what its priorities will be, where it will invest customers' money and how it will aim to maintain or improve the service that it provides. This plan must be approved by the regulators. Portsmouth Water must consider the longer term too, up to 80 years in the future. This includes ensuring that it will continue to be able to provide water to all its customers in the long-term, in the face of the challenges it is facing.

We have asked you to participate in this research because Portsmouth Water wants to understand what its customers think about these issues – including what customers want the company to prioritise as it works towards the future.

- What would you like Portsmouth Water to prioritise over the next 5 years?
- And thinking ahead to the longer-term future, what would you like Portsmouth Water to prioritise?

We've outlined below some further detail on potential priorities for Portsmouth Water over the next 5 years. I'll introduce each of the priorities and run through the accompanying objectives related to that priority and we'll discuss each one in turn. [REFER TO STIMULUS MATERIALS; INTRODUCE EACH ONE AT THE TIME]

List of potential priorities for Portsmouth Water

Secure sustainable water supplies for our customers, which protect and enhance our environment in a changing world	Be at the frontier of delivering high-quality, resilient, net-zero services – for our customers, environment and region	Co-create solutions which deliver our customers', communities', and stakeholders' priorities	Affordable water for all. Always.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide enhanced regional drought resilience by bringing Havant Thicket reservoir into service on schedule by 2029 • Reduce leakage by 50% by 2040, 10 years ahead of government's expectation • Support customers to reduce personal water usage by 25% by 2050 • Deliver 100% domestic smart metering by 2040 • No customers will experience restrictions on their water use, even in a severe drought • We will enhance the quality of the environment on our sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All schools and homes to have access to water with no exposure to lead by 2050 • We will be fully carbon neutral by 2050 • No customers will be without water for over 3 hours by 2030 • Maintain the lowest levels of bursts in the industry • We will collaborate with key stakeholders to ensure all chalk streams in our area are classified as in good health • We will adopt industry-leading innovation to protect our corporate and operational network against cyber-attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers have a choice of tariff based on their needs, priorities and ability to help the environment • We will be consistently recognised by the UK Institute of Customer Service as one of the best performers in the country across all sectors • 100% of our customers will know where their water comes from and their impact on the environment • We will work with all non-household customers and their retailers to reduce water use and achieve 100% smart metering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate water poverty by 2030 • Ensure we are always the most efficient water company in England and Wales to keep customers' bills as low as we can • 100% of vulnerable customers to be supported 24/7

- Overall, what do you think about these priorities?
- Out of the list, please choose what you think should be the top three priorities for the company over the next five years
- And do these priorities change when we look at a more long-term view (i.e. 25 years)?
- Please explain why you picked x as your number one priority
- Please explain why you picked x as your number two priority
- Please explain why you picked x as your number three priority
- Was anything missing from our list? If so, let us know what you would like to see prioritised.

[FOR EACH PRIORITY]

- Overall, what do you think about this priority? [PROMPT FOR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE COMMENTS]
- And what do you think about the objectives? Are there any objectives that you particularly liked?

Now that we've gone through the four priorities listed:

- Overall, what do you think about these priorities?
- Was there anything missing from the list that you think Portsmouth Water should address in the short and long term? If so, let us know what you'd like to see prioritised?

Deep-dives (c.15 mins)

[Cover 2 of the following resources with respondents depending on time – if respondent has already, unprompted, mentioned one of the following resources, do not cover again. See rotation spreadsheet for rotation of resources to cover with respondents.]

1. Bill support

Let's now move on to discuss the support schemes Portsmouth Water have in place to help customers who can't afford their water bills, are struggling with debt or who have additional needs that they should be aware of such as a disability.

Some of the schemes include: [\[REFER TO STIMULUS MATERIALS\]](#)

Arrears Assist: if you have arrears on your account of £300 or more and have not been making regular payments to your account it may be possible for you to apply for help under the Arrears Assist Scheme.

Helping Hand – Social Tariff: Helping hand is a tariff for customers who have a low income or are in receipt of certain benefits. If your application is successful, your water bill will be capped at the minimum charge for the year.

WaterSure: WaterSure is a capped tariff for customers who have a water meter and meet the requirements (receive certain benefits and either have 3 or more children at home or a member of the household requires use of significant amounts of water due to a medical condition).

Payment holiday: You can apply to have a three month payment holiday where no payments need to be made within that period.

- Are you aware of any of the above bill support schemes?
- **ASK IF AWARE:** And if so, have you made use of any of the above schemes? If not, why? [\[PROMPT FOR CHALLENGES REGARDING ACCESS\]](#)
- **ASK IF USED:** We'd like to explore your experience of using these schemes. Please tell us what it was like? [\[PROMPT FOR THE FOLLOWING IF NOT MENTIONED\]](#)
 - Getting access to bill support
 - The impact of receiving support
 - How does it make you feel about Portsmouth Water?
- **ASK IF NOT AWARE:** Now that you are aware of these schemes, would you use them? If not, why?
- **ASK IF NOT USING SCHEMES:** To what extent (if at all), are you happy to pay a more on top of your bills to support these schemes and ensure that water bills are affordable to their water bills? [\[PROMPT FOR REASONS WHY/WHY NOT\]](#)

At the moment around 10,000 Portsmouth Water customers are on the Helping Hand social Tariff support scheme and have on average £25 off their annual bill (which is £104 without the discount). On average, other customers pay 83p extra a year to fund the scheme.

- **ASK IF NOT USING SCHEMES:** How do you feel about this? To what extent would you be willing to pay more towards support schemes? Or would you rather pay less? [\[PROMPT FOR REASONS WHY/WHY NOT\]](#)

2. Metering

I want to turn our focus to metering.

- ~~Are you aware of what metering is? Can you explain what it is?~~
- ~~IF AWARE: Are you aware if you have this in your house?~~

[REFER TO STIMULUS MATERIALS]



Metering means that customers only pay for the water they use (as opposed to paying a flat rate). This should encourage customers to be more careful with water, therefore helping to reduce the pressure on water resource for the region as a whole.

Here is a brief introduction to metering. Metering is where customers only pay for the water they use (as opposed to paying a flat rate). This should encourage customers to be more careful with their water usage, therefore helping to reduce the pressure on water resource on the region as a whole.

Currently, only a third of Portsmouth Water customers have a water meter, so one of the things Portsmouth Water can do to help deal with the water supply challenge is to convert more households to metering.

- What are your views on the idea of more households around Portsmouth having water meters?
- To what extent should Portsmouth Water prioritise introducing meters for those who do not currently have them? Compared to some of the other issues we've been discussing?

Now I want to talk about smart metering. [REFER TO STIMULUS MATERIALS]

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Smart meters offer additional benefits in dealing with the water supply challenge. They provide information on how much water you're using in real time.

The key benefits to smart meters are:

- They help customers understand their usage in even more detail, helping them to be more careful with the water they use
- They help the water company see how water is being used across the network and can help identify leaks that may be difficult to find as they are not above ground

Smart metering typically reduces water usage by about 15-20%.

Smart meters offer additional benefits in dealing with the water supply challenge. They provide information on how much water you're using in real time. The key benefits to smart meters are:

- *They help customers understand their usage, in even more detail, helping them to be more careful with the water they use.*
- *They help the water company see how water is being used across the network and can help identify leaks that may be difficult to find as they are not above ground.*
- *Smart metering typically reduces water usage by up to 20%*

- How do you feel about more households around Portsmouth having smart meters? Why?
- To what extent should Portsmouth Water prioritise introducing smart meters across the region? Compared to some of the other issues we've been discussing?

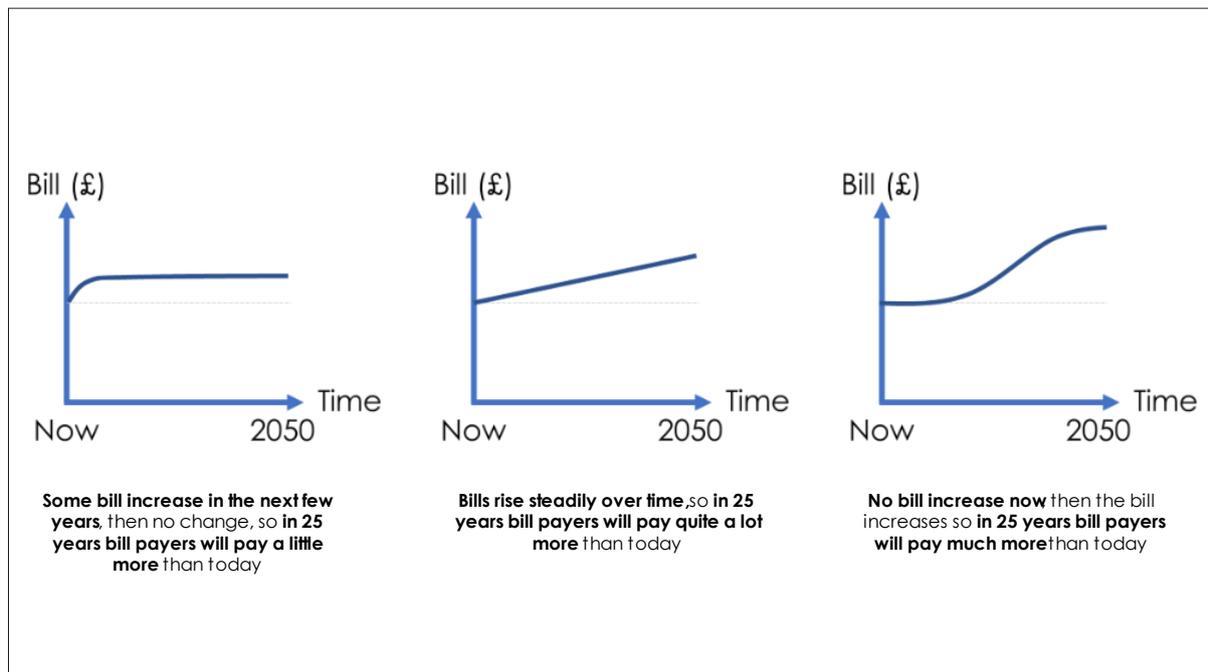
Smart meters allow Portsmouth Water to monitor water usage and therefore be able provide different tariffs. For example, they may be able to offer variable rates throughout the day (e.g. so that water would be cheaper in the evening or during "off-peak" times – e.g. during wetter periods of the year). Or they could charge more once a household goes over a certain threshold of water usage in a day, to disincentivise higher usage.

- *What do you make of this idea? How do you feel about this?*
- *We appreciate that this next question may be difficult to answer but Portsmouth Water would like to understand how they can benefit their customers through more personalised tariffs. What sort of tariff would be attractive to you?*

3. Bill profiles

Portsmouth Water are now taking in account what issues and projects should be prioritised in the future. To deliver on these, Portsmouth Water will need to invest money. It is possible (but not certain) that this might result in a higher customer bill. If they did, there would be several ways of increasing the bills over time. Here are a few models of how they could potentially do this:

[REFER TO STIMULUS MATERIAL, WALK THROUGH OPTIONS]



- Which one of the following three options would you prefer?
- Why do you prefer this option?
- **ASK IF OPTION 1:** And how much would you expect to pay more?

End:

Those are all the questions I wanted to ask you today. Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today, your feedback and answers have been very useful. Before we end the interview do you have any questions for me?

The recruiter Field Mouse has your bank details and your incentive payment should arrive within the next fortnight.