



BLUE MARBLE

Hard to Reach Audiences Report

PR24 research

September 2023



Photo by Mike Handle on Unsplash

1	Sample and methodology
2	Customer context
3	Response to Priority Services Register information and plans
4	Response to Social Tariff information and plans
5	Response to business plan (in overview)
6	Summary conclusions





Sample & methodology



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Background:

This research was commissioned to plug a gap in Portsmouth Water's wider business plan engagement – as well as more broadly informing the business about the needs and expectations of customers who have very specific needs and are hard to reach because of their circumstances.



With a growing focus on inclusivity and accessibility for all customers, Portsmouth Water is looking to understand the views and experiences of these customers – as well as exploring their views on elements of the proposed business plans.

Key objectives:

The overarching objective of this project is to inform Portsmouth Water's future planning and to explore ways to improve the experience and communications with very specific customer segments.

This research sought to:

Understand the specific needs and challenges faced by customers with alternative service and communication needs

Understand response to key areas of the proposed business plan including a high-level overview of the plan and specific service elements; and proposed bill impact by 2030



- 3 group discussions (in-person) ; 6 depth interviews ; 4 'friendship pair' interviews

	 Customers who are visually impaired	 Customers who find it difficult to speak or hear	 Customers unable to communicate in English	 Households with a disability requiring high water use	 Diverse religions & cultures
Stakeholder engagement	2-3 exploratory calls	2-3 exploratory calls	2-3 exploratory calls		2-3 exploratory calls
Stakeholder organised meeting (c.4 service users/members)	1 x 90-minute mini-group held at Portsmouth Library	1 x 90-minute mini-group held at Portsmouth Deaf Centre			1 x 90-minute mini-group held at Cosham Library (Muslim group)
PSR and WaterSure households (from PW supplied lists)	2 x 60-minute in-person depths (with carer/friend/relative)		1 x 60-minute in-person friendship pair	2 x 60-minute in-person depths (with carer/friend/relative)	
Non PSR / free find recruitment		1 x 60-minute in-person depths (with carer/friend/relative)	1 x 60-minute in-person friendship pair		1 x 60-minute online friendship pairs (Hindu). 2 x 60-minute in-person depths (Hindu/Jewish)
Considerations	Verbal stimulus	Require translator (BSL)	Require translator		GIS data to inform religious groups and location
Total participants = c.26	6 customers	6 customers	4 customers	2 customers	8 customers

Fieldwork dates: 4th – 16th August 2023



Customer context

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Water usage and support required

Many like Ruth are isolated from wider society and are reliant upon networks like the Portsmouth Deaf Centre for support.

- Interaction with water companies is often minimal - comms are often unable to be fully understood, as those with long term hearing impairments know little-to-no English.
- Any supply incidents would require the assistance of a family member to report - and potentially even to notice.
- Despite their requirements warranting additional support, customers like Ruth are largely unaware of the PSR and Social Tariff, due to their disconnection from their utility providers.

Those like Ruth, whose first language is BSL, are unable to interact directly with PW without the help of a translator.

- Translators can be expensive, with those who struggle to afford them having to make tough choices with how they use their time - often utility companies aren't their priority.
- Call centres that operate outside of the UK can be especially difficult for those with hearing impairments.
- There is no industry standard for BSL services with utility companies - though banks were mentioned as offering such service.

"For deaf people, [translation services] should be a right."
Hearing Impaired Group

"I also struggle, say, with a utility company, calling a call centre that's not UK-based, doesn't have UK accents in there [...] Quite often, I would need to end the call and get somebody else to help me or go another way."
Depth, Male, 55, Hearing Impaired

Customers we spoke to

- 1x group and 1x depth, participants ranged in age from 40-60.
- **We met all participants at the Portsmouth Deaf Centre.**
- **Almost everyone we spoke to had substantial financial anxieties, many were out of work and very reliant upon support networks like the Deaf Centre in their day-to-day lives.**

What PW needs to consider

Hearing impaired customers like Ruth are very reliant upon support from friends & family and have little to no interaction with their utility providers.

- English is a second language to many with hearing impairments - both speaking and reading.
- As a result of these factors, awareness of support offered by PW is low - only one person we spoke to from this customer group was on the PSR.
- Translators are a key tool for these customers to interact with call centres - and are presently a rare commodity.



Water usage and support required

Visually impaired customers like John are comfortable using water independently, though there are significant issues when it comes to supply problems.

- Whilst no running water would be a noticeable problem, discoloured or unsafe drinking water would be difficult to notice and report without the presence of a family member or carer.
- John felt comfortable receiving a phone call or email from PW in the event of a supply problem, but worried about not receiving this contact, or PW attempting contact via an unsuitable method.
- Participants in the group felt that Southern Water were more active with outreach, whilst they have little contact from Portsmouth Water.

*""When you phone them up they tell you what you're entitled to...[in terms of] registers and discounts and priorities... I don't hear anything from Portsmouth Water at all."
Visually Impaired Group*

Visually impaired customers require a lot of assistance when it comes to contacting utility companies - often being the responsibility of their spouse, or a family member to manage.

- They're often not up-to-date with the latest news / service updates, John isn't aware how much their water bill costs each month, with his wife managing the utility bills.
- Not all visually impaired people can read Braille, John lost their eyesight ten years ago and is in the process of learning Braille - instead, text-to-speech on their laptop allows him to access emails and browse the internet.

Customers we spoke to

- 1x group and 2x depths at Portsmouth library- a key part of the local community for the visually impaired in Portsmouth.
- Participants ranged in age from their 50s to 80s, with all either retired, or out of work and reliant upon other members of their household for income.
- Broad spectrum of differences in circumstances, some were in the process of losing their eyesight, whilst others were wholly reliant upon guide dogs.

What PW needs to consider

Visually impaired customers are not all equally able to read Braille, or digitally equipped to confidently interact with online services.

- Incidents are especially complex for visually impaired customers to deal with, particularly if the incident is more complex than a lack of running water.
- In many instances, visually impaired customers are detached from the process of dealing with their utility companies.
- Only one participant that we spoke to from this group was on the PSR, after attending a community talk from either Portsmouth or Southern Water - the rest were unaware of the support and their eligibility for it.



Water usage and support required

Whilst the Hindu and Jewish customers we spoke to had no specific needs related to their faith, there were several important requirements for Muslim customers like Fatimah.

- The importance of the Wudu cleansing ritual five times per day, and increased emphasis upon hygiene in general for Muslim customers, leads Fatimah to have higher water usage than most.
- Water usage can often be higher with larger households, who are concerned about the negative consequences of being placed on a water meter.
- One participant recalled a recent visit from Southern Water at their local community centre about water saving tips - this was seen as very useful.

*[Speaking about Wudu] "I've got six people in the house...if you times that by five, the amount of water you're using is quite high, so the worry is if meter is put in every household, the anxiousness is severe."
Muslim Group*

Many like Fatimah felt that the current setup for the social tariff did not work well for their household.

- Larger household compositions can lead to customers missing out on financial support - Fatimah's household income exceeds the threshold for the social tariff, despite only one person working in their house of seven.
- As a result of this, many of the Muslim participants felt it was unfair that their water bills were subsidising the social tariff, as they were just above the threshold and still struggling financially.

Customers we spoke to

- 1x group, 1x friendship pair and 2x depths; ranging in age from 20s-80s.
- The group were composed of Muslim women, whilst the friendship pair and one depth were Hindu. The final depth was Jewish.
- Many in this group, particularly the Muslim group, were financially reliant upon their children and lived in multi-generational households.

What PW needs to consider

Customers from diverse cultures and religions feel disconnected from PW, despite several participants being eligible for targeted support.

- The planned rollout of smart meters will potentially have a negative impact upon Muslim households in the Portsmouth area, who are hesitant to take part due to fears around bill increases.
- Portsmouth Water should consider visiting local community centres to share water saving tips, specifically bearing in mind cultural rituals that require high water usage.
- This could also be a helpful means by raising awareness of the PSR and social tariff.



Water usage and support required

Customers like Maria, who have low levels of English speaking struggle to understand, and have difficulties interacting with, Portsmouth Water.

- They rely upon Google translate to be able to understand the comms they receive, which is an especially arduous process if the document is physical.
- Maria had no understanding of how water companies operated in the UK when they migrated several years ago, and thus relied upon internet troubleshooting to get set up.
- There is currently little confidence amongst customers like Maria that Portsmouth Water can meet their needs - communicating with them is often a difficult experience which they're reluctant to do.

"When a letter comes of the bill or something, she'd have to come and ask me about what's going on because I'm in school. She can't understand it properly. I'd say that is quite hard for her".

Depth, Friendship Pair, (Mother and Daughter), Low Levels of English Language

Customers with low levels of spoken English need their experience with Portsmouth Water to be made simpler.

- Like other vulnerable audiences, these customers are reliant upon family members, in this instance those who are more confident in their English-speaking ability, to read comms and deal with PW.
- Resolving issues with their water supply can often be a time-consuming, uncomfortable experience: experiences with engineers are positive, but the language barriers can make complex issues difficult to fully understand.

Customers we spoke to

- **2x friendship pairs.**
- **One pair were two sisters who migrated from Brazil several years ago, the other a mother who had migrated from Bangladesh 25 years ago, and her daughter.**
- **The first pair both work part time, with one also caring for their disabled son. The mother in the second pair is a housewife, whilst her daughter is a student.**

What PW needs to consider

Customers with low levels of spoken English know very little about Portsmouth Water and have little interaction.

- Comms offered in alternate languages would remove the barrier of translation apps and troubleshooting for these customers.
- Customers with low levels of spoken English may not be receiving eligible support due to the language barriers limiting their knowledge and interaction with PW.
- Specific resources, such as accessible information packs upon moving to Portsmouth, would help alleviate their concerns and reduce their reliance upon other online sources, especially for those new to the UK.



Water usage and support required

Customers like Lucy have more interaction with PW than most due to their disabilities.

- These customers had recent positive experiences of communicating with PW and had been on the PSR and social tariff for some time.
- Whilst receiving more communications than other customers we spoke to, Lucy felt reluctant to actively seek support from PW, instead preferring to only call when she has a significant issue.
- Day-to-day, access to water is integral to Lucy, due to their diabetes and sleep apnoea. As they live in assisted living, carers are present on standby to provide support throughout the day.

"[They're] Always polite and try to be as helpful as they can."

Depth, Female, 64, Disability Requiring High Water Use

Customers like Lucy are very apprehensive about bill increases.

- Any and all bill increases have to be carefully managed due to insecure household finances, which places significant stress upon their day-to-day lives.
- Being able to pay bills on time is important to Lucy, and she fears falling behind on payments as a result of bill increases.

"Surviving, with the cost of living and everything that's going on... surviving."

Depth, Female, 64, Disability Requiring High Water Use

Customers we spoke to

- **2x depths, both were out of work due to their disabilities, and were aged between 50s-60s.**
- **One participant lives in assisted accommodation with carers, the other lives with their son and grandchild.**
- **Both were physically disabled, and reliant upon mobility aids. Specific disabilities included diabetes and sleep apnoea.**

What PW needs to consider

Customers with disabilities requiring high water use are particularly apprehensive towards the costs of the business proposals, due to the financial pressures upon them.

- In the context of business plans, they were more critical of the costs than the other customer groups we spoke to - the individual cost of each investment mattered to this group.
- Whilst these customers generally have a better relationship with PW than customers from other vulnerable groups, they still don't have much contact, aside from when receiving bills. Both participants wanted to hear more proactively from PW about the support they can receive.

Customer segment	Key challenges	Recommendation for PW
 <p>Hearing impaired</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those who can only communicate via BSL, there are currently major barriers with all comms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of a phone line service to provide support to those who need BSL or lip reading to communicate.
 <p>Visually impaired</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues with those unable to read Braille, nor fully confident using digital tools drives a disconnect with PW - family or carers take on the responsibility of bills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve targeting for those with visual impairments - ensure these customers receive comms in their ideal format, and don't fall off the radar.
 <p>Diverse religions/cultures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The demand of water-reliant rituals, and often larger, multi-generational households, leads to higher water usage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase awareness of the support on offer with more frequent visits to community centres, to ensure those eligible are aware.
 <p>Low level English</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language barriers - a lack of alternate language comms means a reliance upon translation tools, which is especially painful with paper bills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce targeted support for this group, including the option for comms to be issued in alternate languages.
 <p>Disability requiring high water use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They require significant support in the event of an incident and are especially anxious about rising bill costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be more proactive with outreach - these customers feel reluctant to contact PW unless absolutely necessary.



Broader context: experiences of customer service

Customers generally had positive experiences when dealing with call staff, however there was a clear reluctance amongst participants to seek customer service, especially for those who struggle presently to contact their providers.



- Very difficult for hearing impaired customers to conduct a phone call without a translator - especially when dealing with international call centres.
- Several cases of companies overcharging customers, then being difficult to get hold of to resolve the issue.
- Interaction with utility companies is typically very infrequent, with most only able to recall receiving bills every month/six months.
- The process to get documents in alternate formats can often be time consuming, and result in an excessive amount of paperwork being sent to customers.
- Dealing with engineers can be a stressful experience for those with low levels of English speaking.



- Banks, government departments that have engaged with BSL services: works very well and removes cost for customers.
- Visually impaired participants broadly had good experiences with their utility companies providing Braille or large print copies of documents upon request.
- Calling utility companies was generally a positive experience: call handlers polite and able to resolve issues, though this is a rare event for most.
- Outreach events by utility companies at community centres viewed positively: a helpful means of increasing engagement and support for these groups.

"They're very much in the background in my life, to be honest with you. I don't think I've ever reached out to them really. And I get letters from them and that's about it."

Depth, Male, 22, Jewish

"Once we had to fix the bathtub and none of us were there and it was just her. So it was really difficult for her to talk to him. But she knows the basics. So it was okay. It's just she would need someone there for her to translate."

Depth, Friendship Pair, (Mother and Daughter),
Low levels of English Language

"A utility company or a bank [...] buy units of time and data for a BSL interpreter, when they want to speak to a customer and the customer says, I need support to do this in BSL, then the bank click a button on their computer screen and they're connected to the BSL interpreter."

Depth, Male, 55, Hearing Impaired



Most experiences recounted were positive, though most participants knew little about Portsmouth Water, and only really interacted with the company when setting up / receiving their bills.

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- Main positive is the service provided by PW: most happy with quality of their water, few have had supply interruptions issues.
 - PW bill tended to be among the smallest utility bill participants paid.
 - When participants had issues, PW have been able to resolve them
 - The flexibility of bill formats a real positive across the sample - though this needs to be expanded to meet the needs of low level English speaking customers.

- For visually & hearing-impaired customers, outreach at community hubs has been very helpful, but relies on them being able to attend
- Customers who rely upon friends/family to communicate with PW don't know much about the company.
- Some confusion around the PW/SW split.

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- Those who don't have support with reading bills/communicating are completely detached from PW, despite vulnerabilities.
 - Sense amongst hearing impaired and low level of English participants that support is currently inadequate: they have very little interaction with PW.
 - Customers across the sample were reluctant to contact PW unless they had a significant supply issue.

"I've not had to have great dealings with them, but if I've ever had to phone them up for anything, they've been very helpful."
Depth, Female, 64, Disability Requiring High Water Use

"I don't really know a lot about Portsmouth Water, to be honest, other than that I turn the taps on and you get water from them, obviously."
Depth, Male, 55, Visually Impaired

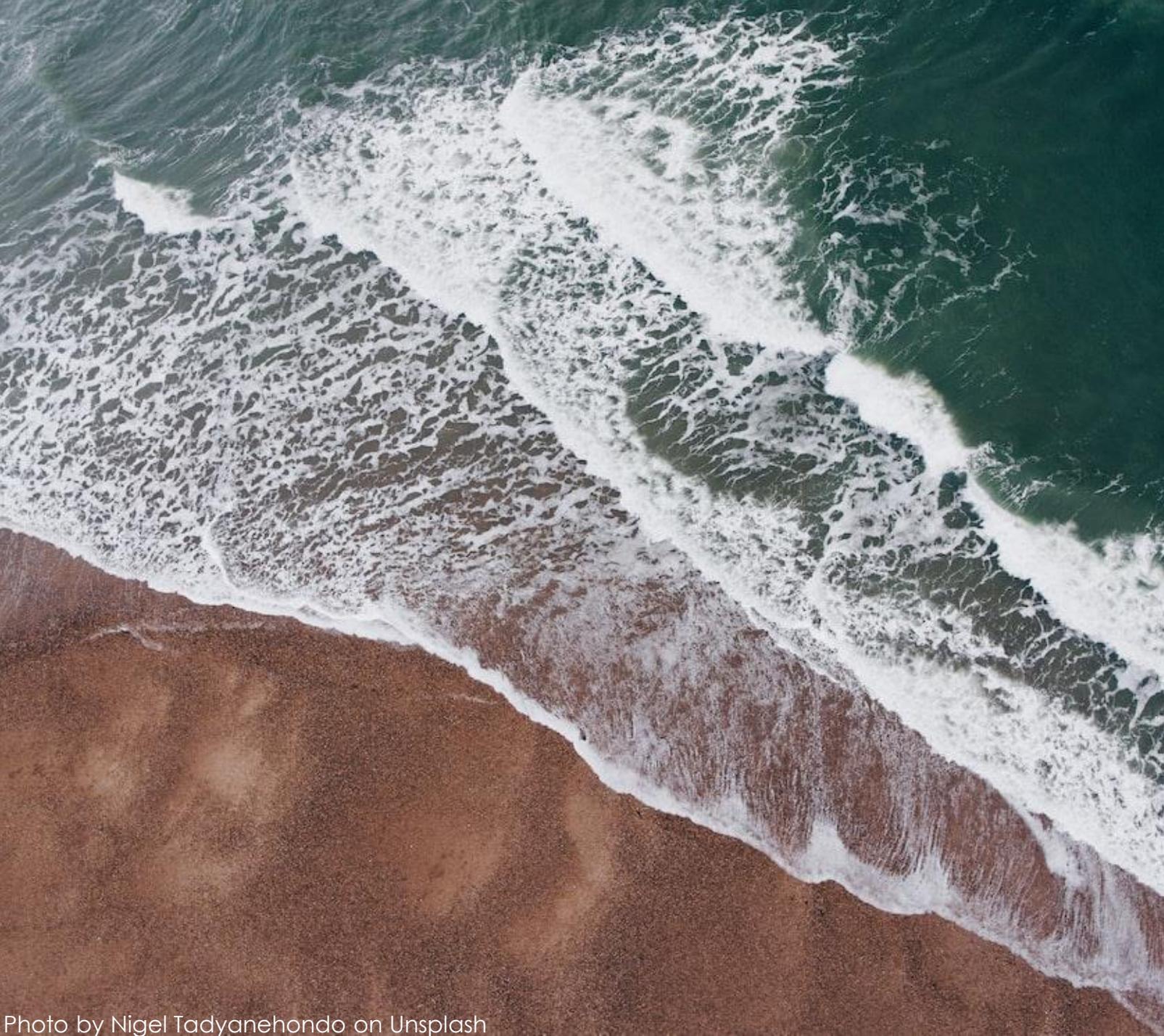
"I don't know nothing about it because my wife deals with it all because she's a sighted person and obviously I can't see. So if we get a water bill or there's a problem with the water, I wouldn't know anything about it because with being blind, I wouldn't be able to read the letters. I'll be snookered, if you know what I mean. I wouldn't have no idea."
Depth, 55, Male, Visual Impairment

"When I arrived here, I didn't have anyone. So it's a lot of Google search. Because we can't understand the website. You don't receive information in your home about the need to pay the water bill."
Depth, Friendship pair, (Sisters), Low levels of English Language

Customer segment	Key concerns
 <p>Hearing impaired</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require greater understanding of the issue with clear communications in an accessible format such as text alerts, video content. Many in the group would be reliant upon the support of a family member in the event of an incident.
 <p>Visually impaired</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would expect to be regularly informed with updates from PW. In terms of a household issue - can easily tell if no running water, but if water is discoloured/unsafe to drink, they're reliant upon others.
 <p>Diverse religions/cultures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For Muslim group, low English language is key barrier to contacting PW in case of incident, while faith means even short supply interruption would be highly anxiety-provoking. Those living with older relatives particularly concerned about their need for drinking water.
 <p>Low level English</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interacting with PW call centres and engineers can often be a difficult process, especially without a family member more confident in their English-speaking ability.
 <p>Disability requiring high water use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply outage a significant concern, especially for those living in assisted accommodation with many other vulnerable people. Reliant upon others to provide drinking water, couldn't comfortably do this independently.

"If it's an emergency, I have to be patient, there's no help really."
Hearing Impaired Group

"I've got to be honest and say that if I went home now and I've never had any water, I literally won't have a clue what to do. I literally won't. I'd have to find out who the water company was, how I would sort it out. I'd have to ask somebody. I'd have to get some sort of help with that one."
Depth, Male, 55, Visually Impaired



Priority Services Register information and plans



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Awareness of PSR by customer segment

Awareness was very low across the sample - even amongst those who said they'd be eligible for this support.



Disability requiring high water use

Both participants in this group were on the PSR and had been for several years.

"They wrote to me about the service and I've been on it ever since, it's been a while now."
Depth, Female, 64, Disability Requiring High Water Use



Visually impaired

Only one person from this group was on the PSR – the rest were wholly unaware of the service.

"I'd need all that. I'd need someone to obviously contact me and let me know there was a problem. They'd have to literally contact me, wouldn't they, for me to know that there was a problem because I would have no idea."
Hearing Impaired Group



Hearing impaired

None were aware of the service, feeling this was due to how disconnected they are from PW.

"We don't get told that information so that's why we don't know."
Hearing Impaired Group



Low level English speaking

Neither friendship pairs were aware of the PSR, with one participant eligible for the service.

"It's a lot more helpful than what you normally get than just a letter."
Depth, Friendship Pair (Mother and Daughter) Low levels of English Language



Diverse cultures and religions

Most in Muslim group had received a talk from SW about water saving, but none knew about the PSR.

"If I receive a letter at home, at least I've got something to show someone, or at least I can look at it, [...] so I could go round and show people and they could help me understand the information there, but first I need to know that I am eligible for that Priority register, and to know this information, someone needs to come and tell me".
Muslim Group



Stimulus shown to participants

Priority Services Register: Where Portsmouth Water is today?

Portsmouth Water currently have a Priority Services Register, with over 30,000 customers on it. The Priority Services Register is a free service for customers who might need extra support, due to their age, health, disabilities etc. It offers a range of services, including assistance with sending bills, home visits, warnings for emergencies and interruptions etc



What Portsmouth Water is proposing:

Additional support to vulnerable customers

- Maintaining communications with those on the register to ensure it is continuing to meet their needs.
- As Portsmouth Water moves towards smart metering, it could provide further support to vulnerable customers such as a service identifying customers who have not used water and alerting a family member. This could help identify if someone has had an accident or has become ill.



The PSR plans were well-received, however initial awareness of the service was very low across the sample, causing some to question why they weren't made aware of this.



Vast majority of participants approved of the improvements to the PSR.

Proposed notification service was a real positive across the sample.

Greater connectivity and support from PW seen as a necessary addition.

"Well, like I said, I didn't even know there was such a thing, but I think it's a very honourable scheme to have, especially if they're not charging the customer anything."
Depth, Male, 85, Hindu

"I think anything that can connect and tell us there's an issue, or solve an issue, or tell us there's something we need to do would be useful."
Depth, Male, 55, Hearing Impaired

"Now, what happens to a customer that's on your priority list who can't use a computer and they don't have a smartphone phone, et cetera. How do you deal with them?"
Depth, Male, 77, Visual Impairment

"I think it's good, but I didn't know everything that was on there."
Depth, Female, 57, Disability Requiring High Water Use (PSR recipient)

Some questioned how PSR customers without access to technology would get the same support.

Hearing impaired participants wanted more specific support with BSL interpreters.

Many participants felt that the customer base needed to be expanded - 30,000 isn't enough.

PSR plan seemed to lack support for those with low level English speaking.

Those who felt they were eligible, yet not on PSR questioned why they weren't already aware of this service.





More work needs to be done to make sure vulnerable customers aren't falling through the cracks and missing out on vital PSR support.



PSR customers without digital access need greater consideration - especially with proposed smart meter notification system.



The support provided to hearing impaired customers needs reform - BSL translators a key piece of support currently missing.



Customers with low levels of English speaking felt to be neglected by PW - this should be incorporated into the PSR service.

The vast majority of participants were unaware of the PSR service - therefore approached the plan from the perspective of the PSR being an entirely new scheme.





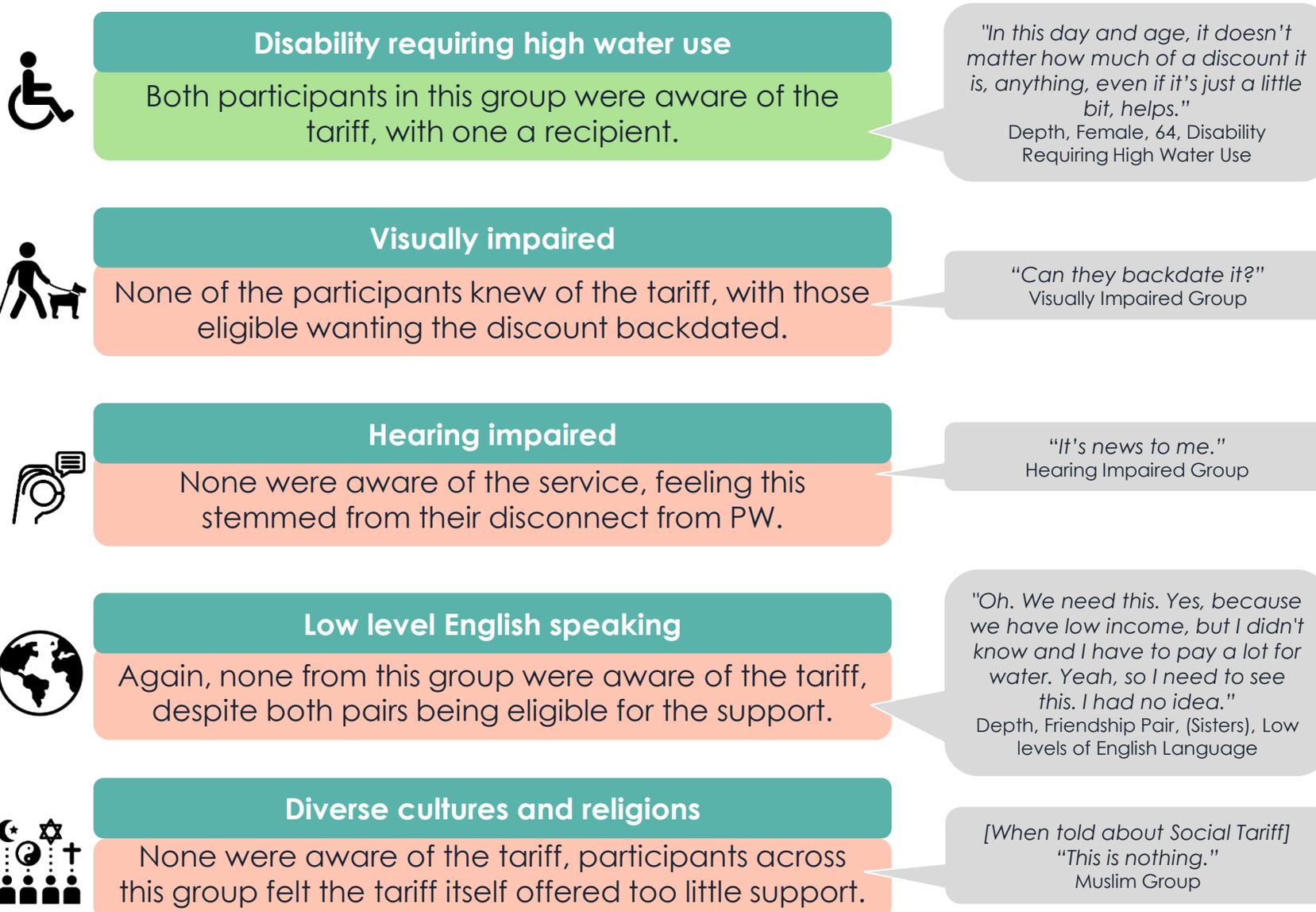
Social Tariffs information and plans

Photo by Sohaim Siddiquee on Unsplash



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As with the PSR, awareness of the social tariff was very low despite many being eligible for the support.



Stimulus shown to participants

Social tariffs: Where Portsmouth Water is today.

Portsmouth Water currently has a social tariff, where 11,000 customers only pay its minimum tariff. This currently equates to a 40% reduction from an average annual bill, down to £88.53.

What Portsmouth Water is proposing:

Being part of a future national discount scheme

At the moment, we expect this scheme to provide a £5 discount to all customers on universal/pension credit.

This will be a minimum discount, with those who are on universal/pension credit and also qualifying for our social tariff receiving the higher social tariff discount.

Development of a financial hardship fund

This would be a 'pot' of funding that would be available for any customer to access, should they meet specific criteria.

The criteria would be developed with customers and organisations such as Citizens Advice.

Target for 2030

Portsmouth Water is targeting having 27,500 customer registered for a social tariff by 2030.



Social Tariffs plans: acceptability

Each different element of the social tariff plans were well-received, however the financial details, and perceived complexities of the improvements, prompted criticism.



The proposed improvements were comprehensive, and widely seen as acceptable.

The collaboration with Citizens Advice perceived positively - some had been supported by them previously.

Accessibility of hardship fund very helpful with how quickly circumstances can change.

Participants got behind the need to greatly expand the ST customer base.

"I personally don't mind paying a little bit extra for people who are struggling to pay. It won't worry me. And obviously, if you can't afford it, then subsidising it is a good idea, isn't it?"
Depth, Male, 55, Visually Impaired

"That's a good idea too- 5 pounds is not a lot, but it's something. Something is better than nothing."
Hearing Impaired Group

"It's one of those things that unless someone tapped you on the shoulder and says, excuse me, do you know you can claim this or can claim that, then I just wouldn't be able to do it."
Depth, Male, 77, Hearing Impaired

"That's two cups of coffee! No, it's not even that!"
Visually Impaired Group

Threshold for eligibility seems too low in light of inflation.

Financial hardship fund seemed vague which caused confusion.

Amount on offer from national discount scheme seen as far too little.

Both the current and targeted number for customers on the tariff weren't deemed high enough.

Extra funding schemes welcome, but some felt these would require further hurdles to access.

"I'm thinking about a lot of really hard up people in Portsmouth that don't know about it."
Hearing Impaired Group





There is a clear need to raise awareness with those eligible, yet not on the social tariff - though this needs to be carefully managed.



Many participants felt the current guidance around tariff eligibility was unclear - for example questioning whether their pension or benefits formed part of the £21,000 p/a threshold.



The threshold for tariff eligibility was widely viewed as inadequate, particularly in the current economic climate - some also felt reforms were necessary to allow low-income larger households eligibility.



Once in place, the plan elements should be reviewed on a regular basis, to ensure the support remains adequate in the evolving economic climate.

Several who were unaware of their eligibility for the tariff felt that discounts should be backdated and were disappointed to have missed out on this support for a long period of time - this will have to be managed with care.





Overall business plan



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Photo by Henry Be on Unsplash

Stimulus shown to participants



WATER SUPPLY INTERRUPTIONS LASTING LONGER THAN THREE HOURS

CHALLENGE

Maintain our water supplies as the **most reliable in the country**, and at least as reliable as they are today (an average of 2 minutes 15 seconds).

2025-2030

Invest more to upgrade ageing water treatment works, pumps and water mains. To maintain our industry leading service, would cost an additional £3.35 plus inflation on bills by 2030.

LONG TERM

Keep our services the **most reliable** in the country and work towards no interruptions beyond three hours.



THE APPEARANCE, TASTE AND SMELL OF TAP WATER

Maintain our position as one of the best performing companies with lower contacts than the industry target.

Add more ultraviolet treatment to our works, partner with landowners to stop pollutants reaching water sources and replace more water mains.

Keep our water quality contacts among the **lowest** in the country.



REDUCING LEAKS

Maintain our position as one of the best performing companies and reduce leaks from 77 litres per property per day to 56 litres by 2030.

Transform our network into a 'smart' one to monitor flows, employ advanced sound and satellite technology, repair leaks on customers' supply pipes free of charge (conditions apply) and increase our workforce. Our fast-track plan to reduce leakage would cost an extra £2.75 plus inflation on bills by 2030.

Halve leakage by 50% by 2040, 10 years earlier than we must.



Customers across segments were generally happy with the overall business plan ideas and agreed they all sounded worthwhile.



The appearance, taste and smell of tap water

For those from diverse cultures, hearing impaired and those with low level English speaking the water quality required improvement, with complaints that the water was too hard, discoloured or had an unusual taste.

Participants questioned how they would know whether the water quality plan had been achieved, especially if they couldn't see it. They queried whether someone from PW would test their water quality for them.

"I don't know how you'd be able to tell he was getting better quality water. How would you know? Obviously I won't be able to tell because I can't see it."
Depth, Male, 55, Visually Impaired

"Yeah, for me, the taste is very different. I don't drink water direct from the tap... I need a filter."
Depth, Friendship Pair, (Sisters), Low Levels of English Language



Water supply interruptions lasting longer than three hours

Seen as very important. Most had not experienced interruptions and were thankful this is not an issue where they lived (but were aware that other people in Portsmouth were less fortunate).

The Muslim group in particular felt it was not ambitious enough as an aim – and that three hours was still too long.

Some confusion as to how can they set a time frame for resolving supply interruptions without knowing requirements of any particular future incident.

"It's important. Because in Brazil, it's very normal to have interruptions, two, three days or you just have water at night. I don't know. Terrible. Because you don't do a shower, the cooking."
Depth, Friendship Pair, (Sisters), Low Levels of English Language



Reducing leaks

For many this was especially important, with water wastage a key issue. There was general surprise about the current level of leaks, and all felt it was a very worthwhile plan (the only contention being how to pay for it).

There was high interest in the free repairs, however some confusion about why customer's supply pipes could be repaired free of charge, but customers would have to pay for repairs elsewhere on the network.

"I maintain my property, I pay extra for insurance to pay for leaks... so why am I being charged to cover [someone else's leaks]...."
Muslim Group

"We should not waste water, that's part of our religious practice... wasting water is one of those things that we must not do because there'll come a day in our life that we'll struggle for water in the hereafter."
Muslim Group

"I'm quite shocked how much water gets wasted... I always think wastage is one of the worst things. So if you can stop wastage by improving the service I ain't got a problem with that at all."
Depth, Male, 55, Visually Impaired



Stimulus shown to participants

WHERE WE'D LIKE TO INVEST TO DO MORE



INSTALLING SMART METERS

CHALLENGE

Our customers use more water than most in the UK. **We need to make better use of water available** and find and fix more leaks to meet the challenges of climate change, population growth and to protect the environment.

2025-2030

Install smart meters for nearly half our customers, supported by water-saving advice and tools for households and businesses, as well as free leak repairs on supply pipes (*conditions apply*). We'll make sure all customers can afford their bill.

LONG TERM

Install smart meters for **all households by 2035** and trial innovative water-saving tariffs.



REMOVING LEAD PIPES

Lead water pipes are now banned because they can impact the development of young children. We've replaced most lead pipes on our network and use harmless chemicals to reduce traces of lead. **We want to remove lead pipes completely.**

Replace lead pipes so all schools and vulnerable homes can access water with no exposure to lead by 2030, and at a further 15% of homes. The 15% of homes would cost an extra £41 million and add £5.25 plus inflation on bills by 2030.

Find and replace lead pipes at **all homes by 2060.**



IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment we rely on is under threat from climate change. **We want to further improve land we own for plants and animals** and give more grants to help others create wildflower meadows, ponds, improve woodlands and do research.

Improve the environment at our key sites and double the grants we give each year to £100,000. To increase our environmental work would cost an extra £4.75 million and add 40p plus inflation on bills by 2030.

Continue to **invest** in environmental partnerships to **maintain** the environment for water supplies.

YOUR BILL



The average bill will increase by **£2.15/month by 2030**, plus inflation
£1.17 to meet the investment required by the regulators
£0.98 to meet the investments we propose over and above this



The introduction of smart meters received the most negative response, especially for those most concerned about the impact this would have on their bill beyond the initially investment cost.



Installing smart meters

Questions as to their necessity, and whether they will lead to bill increases.

Due to perceived high water usage, the Muslim group in particular were very nervous about being put onto smart water meters as they thought this would increase their bill considerably, with one saying the idea would give her a panic attack.

The use of smart meters to help cut down on wastage however was seen as really worthwhile and corresponds with the Muslim belief that water is precious.

"I personally won't have one, only because I've got a big garden, I'm a keen gardener, so I'll be frightened to water my garden if I had a water meter."
Depth, Male, 55, Visually Impaired



Removing lead pipes

Those with more knowledge about the issues associated with lead pipes were surprised about the number still in use – and therefore saw this aim as highly worthwhile and urgent.

Some were concerned about their presence, especially with the mention of schools and vulnerable homes being prioritised.

However, older customers especially were sceptical about the need to change lead pipes, arguing that they had never had any issues. Many had no awareness of any potential adverse consequences.

"If you think about it, lead piping was put in by an old water company. This water company is ... now saying, We use lead pipes. We don't like it ... We're going to make you pay to get rid of it. That's what they're saying. I don't mind all the others, but that's a little bit naughty, isn't it?"
Depth, Male, 77, Visually Impaired



Improving the environment

This plan frequently ranked high amongst participant's priorities, with many believing this to be an important responsibility for PW.

Participants across the sample were aware of the pressing need for action on climate change and felt the actions of this plan were necessary.

The low cost especially stuck out, with customer's seeing it as a cost that may as well be included, in the context of more expensive plan elements.

"Yeah, I mean, 40 pence a year is nothing. So I wouldn't see any reason not to do that. Yeah, it's so cheap, there's no point in not doing it."
Depth, Male, 22, Jewish



Acceptability

- Overall seen as a positive plan, with necessary and worthwhile investments which will provide them with an improved service.
- The key contentious topic is the cost – and even customers who weren't personally worried about their finances objected to the principle behind their responsibility of paying for some of the proposed investments, such as leak repairs.
- Some of the older customers were also very sceptical that the investments would really happen (while others were slightly resistant to pay more when they didn't think they'd necessarily live to see the results of it).

"Anything to do to tackle those would be smart, quite honestly. Everybody wants improved quality for water, reducing down the leaks and so forth. It's paramount to keeping our costs down."

Depth, Male, 55, Hearing Impaired

"It's just words...most companies have got a vision... nothing ever happens, so, wait and see!"

Visually Impaired Group

"The work they're doing is great. If it makes it easier for communication and all that, it's really helpful. It's just the part about the payment. The 30 quid extra, it is a bit hard."

Depth, Friendship Pair (Mother and Daughter) Low levels of English Language

"The money is nothing, but it's the principle behind it. If it's going to cost them that much, why aren't they paying half of it?... Well, I thought Portsmouth Water was the magic company and it was different to all the rest. But apparently, it's not."

Depth, Male, 77, Visually Impaired

Affordability

- A minority of customers were not concerned about the cost – which they thought negligible. However, they were only happy to pay based on the assumption that they would notice tangible improvements to the service.
- Most agreed that while the individual costs of each investment weren't particularly high, the overall increase for the full plan was too high and would not be affordable to them on top of all the other increases in costs.
- Others felt resigned to the increased costs based on rises across other utilities.

"That £3.35 makes you think that's not much, but it all adds up... its good but if you want it done, it's all got to be paid for."

Depth, Female, 64, Disability Requiring High Water Use

"I ain't got a problem paying extra for anything, providing you getting a better service. But if you're paying extra money and you're not getting value for money, then I won't be very happy about it."

Depth, Male, 55, Visually Impaired

"Everywhere you look it's just adding the bills more isn't it...there's no win."

Muslim Group





Summary conclusions



1

These 'minority' customer groups have little interaction with Portsmouth Water.

Despite most requiring additional support, they broadly feel unable to contact PW unless they have a significant issue.

2

As we know from previous research, there is an evident shortfall in those eligible for the social tariff and / or PSR being aware of the schemes.

When made aware of the schemes, participants didn't feel confident in registering, given their communication barriers.

3

Participants felt PW's support needs to be expanded to offer greater services.

Suggestions included alternate language bills, and an improved BSL service to allow support with phone calls for those with hearing impairments.

4

The business plan was broadly acceptable, though affordability is a real concern.

Whilst the individual plan costs weren't particularly high, the total increase was seen as unaffordable to many, especially in the context of other rising bills and inflation.

5

Greater community engagement is a key tool that can be used to make progress with these audiences.

Those who could recall a visit from PW or another service provider were positive about their experience.





BLUE MARBLE

www.bluemarbleresearch.co.uk



74. Portsmouth Hard to Reach Audiences Report v2.0

Standards for high-quality research:	How addressed in this project:
Useful and contextualised	This research was commissioned to understand the customer needs, expectations, and response to elements of the proposed business plan. For respondents, they were provided with stimulus materials to help understand the question context and in some cases, to help them articulate their preferences. This project was added to the research programme as a gap in the evidence had been identified (documented in the synthesis reports)
Fit for purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hence, clear objectives that sat within the wider research and engagement programme were agreed at the outset Purposefully recruited sample to reflect specific Portsmouth Water customers and included: customers who are visually impaired; customers who find it difficult to speak or hear; customers unable to communicate in English; households with a disability requiring high water use; diverse religions & cultures Recruited by Blue Marble through stakeholder engagement; regional field recruiters, both free-find and via customer lists provided by Portsmouth Water (PSR/WaterSure) Sample size proportionate for a qualitative project focusing on hard to hear samples Method to reflect the nature of the objectives: primarily face to face groups held in local community organisations (stakeholders facilitated the locations and practical arrangements); to allow for open-ended, personal reflections with depth interviews for those with specific perspectives or for whom the group method would not be suitable. Some samples were interviewed in friendship pairs for the comfort and confidence of respondents
Neutrally designed	Blue Marble designed research materials including the discussion guides and stimulus materials. These are all designed with impartiality.
Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulus produced in plain English – all mediated by a research moderator and accompanied by translators (BSL signers) where needed Option for respondents to bring a supporter to the sessions (to help navigate online tech and/or the research questions – who would also be paid an incentive)
Continual	While this was a one-off project it forms part of an ongoing commitment to conduct research with a wide cross section of customers.
Shared in full	Portsmouth Water to publish this report and supporting appendices on its website.
Ethical	Blue Marble is a company partner of the MRS, senior team members are all Members of the MRS and/or SRA. All Blue Marble's employees abide by the MRS Code of Conduct and as such all our research is in line with their ethical standards.
Independently assured	This report assured by Sia Partners

