

Vulnerability strategy research supporting materials 2024

Contents

1. Recruitment screener	2
2. Discussion guide	18
3. Interview stimulus	27

1. Recruitment screener

Wessex Water
Customer Vulnerability Strategy
Household customers

RECRUITMENT PARTNER: BEAM

Overview of the sample **[RECRUITER NOTE – THIS SCREENER IS FOR THE FREE-FIND SECTION OF THE SAMPLE ONLY]**

Participation type:

60 minute in-depth interview

	Financial vulnerabilities (financial support)	Additional needs when a problem occurs (incident support)	Additional needs for everyday matters (communication/ accessibility support)
Recent experience: Sample recruited using customer lists provided by Wessex Water	On a social tariff and had recent intervention/support (in last year)	PSR customer and had recent service experience (in last year)	PSR customer with communication / accessibility needs
<i>Number of respondents</i>	6	6	6
No recent experience: Free-find recruitment	No recent intervention support (may or may not be on a social tariff)	Eligible for PSR (may or may not be on it) – with non-financial vulnerabilities	Eligible for PSR (may or may not be on it)– with communication/ accessibility barriers
<i>Number of respondents</i>	6	6	6
Transient Vulnerabilities	Aim to recruit some across sample in transient vulnerability i.e. those experiencing temporary vulnerable circumstances		
Metered	Min. 15 metered, min. 15 non-metered (NB: can be relaxed about meeting the non-metered quota)		
Gender	Aim for even mix male and female		
Lifestage	Aim to recruit mix as far as possible		
Age	Good spread across the sample		
Household Makeup	Min. 8 across sample to have children in the household		
Geographic location	Good spread of urban and rural areas and good spread across Wessex Water region		
Total	36		

Incentives:



- Each participant will receive an incentive of £50 for their time. If the presence of a carer is necessary to enable the respondent to participate, an additional incentive of £50 will be offered. Maximum of 6 interviews with carer present to be recruited across the whole sample.

Research overview:

This research will shape Wessex Water's customer vulnerability strategy. Wessex need to understand whether the support provided (based on its current vulnerability strategy) is meeting the needs of customers – and that it is effectively reaching under-represented and hard-to-reach groups. The research also needs to identify where the current strategy can improve to meet today's needs.

INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm calling from BEAM, a market research recruitment company.

We are looking for people who receive services from Wessex Water (wastewater only OR water and wastewater services) to take part in an exciting project. The project will cover how Wessex serves its customers. We will be asking you all about your specific needs, the experiences you have had with Wessex Water, and what they could do to support you better, and ensure you have a positive experience with them in the future.

The research will involve a one-hour conversational interview with an independent researcher from a market research company called Blue Marble. This interview would take place at some point over the next few weeks, and would most likely be online, via ZOOM.

For taking part, you would receive a financial incentive of £50.

HOUSEHOLD SCREENER

Are you interested in taking part? If yes, then to ensure that we get a broad range of people involved we need to ask you a few additional questions about your life and attitudes. Are you happy for me to take you through some questions?

OVERALL ELIGIBILITY

E1) Can I please check, who is your water and wastewater provider?

Wessex Water – Water and wastewater	1	CONTINUE AND RECRUIT MIX SCROSS SAMPLE
Wessex Water – waste only	2	
Any other provider	3	CLOSE
Don't know	4	CLOSE

E2) Which of the following best describes your responsibility for paying your water bill?

I am solely responsible	1	CONTINUE
I am jointly responsible	2	CONTINUE
Someone else is responsible but I have some oversight	3	CONTINUE
I am not responsible	4	CLOSE

RECORD FOR INFO

GENERAL QUESTIONS

G1) How many times have you ever participated in market research of any kind?

Number of times participated:	_____
-------------------------------	-------

CLOSE IF 4+

IF 1+ AT G1

G2) What were the topics discussed during the market research you participated in?

Topics:	_____
---------	-------

CLOSE IF TOPIC RELATED TO INCIDENTS WITH WATER SUPPLY, WESSEX WATER COMPANY SERVICES ETC.

G3) Do you or does anyone in your household work for any of the following, or have worked at the following within the past 5 years?

	Yes	No
TV/Radio station/media	CLOSE	
Newspaper/Magazine/Journalism	CLOSE	
Public relations (PR)	CLOSE	
Water/ water infrastructure	CLOSE	
Market Research	CLOSE	

CLOSE IF 'YES' FOR ANY INDUSTRY LISTED

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

D1) Please can you provide me with the following contact details
 Please note these will not be used for any purposes other than contacting you about this research.

Name:	_____
Mobile Number:	_____
Email Address:	_____
Address	_____

RECORD FOR INFO
CHECK ELIGIBILITY OF REGION. AIM FOR GOOD SPREAD ACROSS WESSEX WATER REGION

D2) RECRUITER CODE GENDER:

Man	1	CONTINUE
Woman	2	CONTINUE
Non-binary	3	CONTINUE
Prefer to self-describe	4	CONTINUE
Prefer not to say	99	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR INFO
AIM FOR APPROX. EVEN SPLIT OF 1 AND 2, WITH 3 AND 4 RECORDED FOR INFO

D3) Please can you tell me your age:

Age:	_____
------	-------

RECORD FOR INFO
AIM FOR GOOD SPREAD AND AVOID SAMPLE SKEWING TO OLDER PEOPLE

D4) Which of the following best describes your family makeup?

I am single and have no children	1	NO-CHILDREN FAMILY
I am in a long-term relationship but we do not live together or have children	2	
I am in a long-term relationship / married and cohabit with my partner, but we have no children	3	
I am single/married/have a partner and have children aged between 0-11 at home living with me/us	4	FAMILY WITH CHILDREN
I am single/married/have a partner and have children aged between 11-16 at home living with me/us	5	



I am single/married/have a partner and have children, but they are 17 or older, and/or no longer live with me/us	6	POST CHILDREN FAMILY / EMPTY NESTER
I am divorced / widowed and currently live alone	7	
I am retired/ part of a retired couple	8	

RECORD FOR INFO

AIM FOR GOOD SPREAD, WITH MIN. 8 ACROSS SAMPLE WITH CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD (CODE 4 OR 5)

D5) Thinking about where you live, would you class the area in which you live as:

Rural	1	
Suburban	2	
Urban	3	

RECORD FOR INFO

AIM FOR GOOD SPREAD

D6) For classification purposes, which of the following best describes the profession of the person in your household with the largest income:

Higher managerial/ professional/ administrative (e.g., Doctor, Solicitor, Board Director)	1	A
Intermediate managerial/ professional/ administrative (e.g., trainee Doctor or Solicitor, Director of small company, middle management)	2	B
Supervisory / junior managerial/ professional/ administrative (e.g., Office worker, Foreman, Salesperson)	3	C1
Student	4	C1
Skilled manual worker (e.g., Bricklayer, Carpenter, Plumber, Painter, HGV/Bus driver, pub/bar worker)	5	C2
Semi or unskilled manual work (e.g., Manual workers, apprentice, Caretaker, van driver, shop assistant)	6	D
Casual worker – not in permanent employment	7	E
Housewife/ Homemaker	8	E
Retired and living on state pension / other income	9	E
Unemployed or not working due to long-term sickness	10	E
Full-time carer of another household member	11	E

RECORD FOR INFO

HEALTH/VULNERABILITY QUESTIONS

V1a) We want to make sure we are being inclusive in our research and including people and households who reflect a wide range of circumstances. I'm going to read out a list of circumstances. Please can you tell me if one or more of these circumstances apply to you, or to someone in your household?

RECRUITER: READ OUT CONDITIONS ONE BY ONE AND PAUSE TO ALLOW RESPONDENT TO ANSWER EACH ONE BEFORE MOVING ON

		Myself	Free-Find
A physical health condition that impacts daily living e.g. the ability to work, the need for either daily care; or the need for targeted support to carry out tasks associated with normal living (shopping, cleaning, getting around). This may include cancer, diabetes, heart disease etc.	1	DISABILITY/PHYSICAL HEALTH CONDITION	RECRUIT 6 FROM CODES 1-9 WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR PSR AIM FOR GOOD SPREAD ACROSS ALL CODES PRIORITISE CODES 1-4 OVER CODES 5-9 ('TRANSIENT VULNERABILITIES')
A mental health condition that sometimes or always impacts daily living in terms of working or managing certain tasks/situations	2	MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION IN HOUSEHOLD	
A physical disability affecting daily living e.g. long-term health condition that limits mobility and requires wheelchair / stair lift	3	DISABILITY/PHYSICAL HEALTH CONDITION	
A health condition that specifically relies on using water e.g. kidney dialysis; skin conditions or health issues that require additional bathing or washing machine use	4	DISABILITY/PHYSICAL HEALTH CONDITION	
Sudden loss of household income: redundancy, contract termination, inability to work	5	TRANSIENT VULNERABILITY	
Short term health issue: injury, surgery/post op recovery or serious illness that is temporarily impacting the ability to carry on with life in the normal way	6	TRANSIENT VULNERABILITY	
Having a newborn baby in the home	7	TRANSIENT VULNERABILITY	



Bereavement of partner, parent, close family member in the last year	8	TRANSIENT VULNERABILITY	RECRUIT 6 FROM CODES 10-12 WHO ARE ALSO ELIGIBLE FOR PSR WITH COMMUNICATION / ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS
Relationship breakdown: divorce, or separation from partner (where living together, sharing financial responsibilities.) in the last year	9	TRANSIENT VULNERABILITY	
A visual or hearing impairment which impacts daily living	10	COMMUNICATION VULNERABILITY	
Wanting communication support (for reasons of e.g. cognitive impairment including Dementia, mental health, additional presence preferred, speech impairment, unable to answer door, developmental condition, those who want support with written communication needs)	11	COMMUNICATION VULNERABILITY	
Low proficiency in English	12	COMMUNICATION VULNERABILITY	
None of the above	13	CONTINUE	

RECORD FOR ALL.

ASK IF CODE 10 AT V1A)

V1b) You mentioned you have a visual or hearing impairment which impacts daily life. Please could you tell us a bit more about your condition, and how it affects you?

Impact on daily life:	_____
-----------------------	-------

RECORD FOR INFO – ENSURE IMPACTS DAILY LIFE, GAUGE SEVERITY

V2) Do any of the following statements apply to you?

			Free Find
My household income is less than £18,000 per year	1	FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE	RECRUIT 6 WHO CODE 2 OR MORE OF 1-3 AND HAVE NOT HAD RECENT FINANCIAL INTERVENTION / SUPPORT IN LAST YEAR
I struggle to pay household bills and am sometimes in arrears or have received support to manage debt	2	FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE	
I receive benefits such as Universal Credit or pension credit payments	3	FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE	
None of the above	4	RECORD	

RECORD FOR INFO

IF 2 OR MORE OF THESE APPLY, COUNT AS FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE

RECRUIT FREE FIND 6 FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE WHO HAVE NOT RECEIVED RECENT INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT (IN LAST YEAR)

WATER SERVICE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

W1) The Priority Services Register (PSR) is a free service that provides extra advice, support and help for your electricity, gas, or water supply. The service supports customers who may have additional requirements and may need extra help.

As far as you know, are you on the Priority Services Register?

I am on the PSR	1	PSR CUSTOMER
Eligible for PSR as 'Yes' for codes 1-12 at V1	2	PSR ELIGIBLE CUSTOMER
Not on or eligible for PSR	3	CONTINUE
Don't know	4	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR ALL

NOTE – FREE FIND RECRUITS CAN BE ON PSR ALREADY OR NOT, BOTH CAN BE INCLUDED

W2a) Does your household receive additional support for your water bills such as a low rate tariff or help with bills or debt?

Yes	1	SOCIAL TARIFF CUSTOMER
I do not receive any additional support	2	CONTINUE
Don't know	3	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR ALL

W2b) Aside from any low rate tariffs you are on, have you received any other types of financial support from your water company in the past year, for example through payment holidays or payment plans?

Yes: [OPEN TEXT]	1	FINANCIAL SUPPORT / INTERVENTION
No	2	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR INFO

RECRUITER TO NOTE THE EXAMPLE OF SUPPORT IF 'YES'

RECRUIT FREE FIND 6 FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE WHO HAVE NOT RECEIVED RECENT INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT (IN LAST YEAR)

W2c) Have you actively approached your water company for any type of support in the past year?

Yes: support related to my social tariff, including being placed on it	1	FINANCIAL SUPPORT / INTERVENTION
Yes: support related to another financial matter e.g. payment plan, debt	2	

Yes: Other form of support	3	RECORD
No	4	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR INFO

RECRUIT FREE FIND 6 FINANCIALLY VULNERABLE WHO HAVE NOT RECEIVED RECENT INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT (IN LAST YEAR)

W3a) Have you experienced an incident with your water (or wastewater) service in the past year? E.g. not being able to use the water in your home, because of a disruption in supply, or after receiving a notice telling you not to?

Yes: [OPEN TEXT]	1	INCIDENT EXPERIENCE
No	2	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR ALL

RECRUITER TO RECORD THE EXAMPLE OF INCIDENT IF 'YES'

IF CODE 1 AT W3a)

W3b) Did you receive support from Wessex Water during this service incident?

Yes: [OPEN TEXT]	1	CONTINUE
No	2	CONTINUE
Not sure	3	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR ALL

W4) Do you have a water meter installed in your home?

Yes, I have a water meter	1	METERED CUSTOMER
No, I do not have a water meter	2	NON-METERED CUSTOMER
Don't know	3	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR INFO

MINIMUM OF 15 ACROSS WHOLE SAMPLE TO BE METERED, MINIMUM OF 15 ACROSS WHOLE SAMPLE TO BE NON-METERED

PLATFORM QUESTIONS

P1a) Usually we hold our research on ZOOM. This enables us to screen-share images, presentations and videos which will be easier for you to view on larger devices.

With this in mind, please tell us which devices you have available to access the event on via ZOOM:

Laptop computer	1	CONTINUE
Desktop computer	2	CONTINUE
Tablet	3	CONTINUE
Mobile phone	4	CONTINUE

I don't have a device, but I could dial in on a landline telephone	5	CONTINUE
--	---	-----------------

RECORD FOR INFO

P1b) How do you feel about using your device to join a ZOOM meeting?

VERY PROFICIENT: I have ZOOM on my device and can log onto it easily	1	CONTINUE
PROFICIENT: I have ZOOM, but I don't really use it, but I can get it working myself.	2	CONTINUE
NEED SOME ASSISTANCE: I don't have ZOOM, but I can download it and get it working myself or with some instruction	3	CONTINUE
NEED ASSISTANCE: I don't have ZOOM and need assistance to get it and use it	4	CONTINUE

IF CODE 3 OR 4 – MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR INSTRUCTIONS AND TECH HELP PRIOR TO THE RESEARCH SESSION

P1c) We realise for some ZOOM can be difficult. Would you prefer to take part in the research in another way?

Microsoft Teams	1	CONTINUE
Google Meets	2	CONTINUE
Telephone	3	CONTINUE
WhatsApp	4	CONTINUE
Other (specify)	5	CONTINUE
In-person, in your home	6	CONTINUE

RECORD FOR INFO – UP TO 6 DEPTHS HELD IN-PERSON

SUPPORT QUESTIONS

S1) Will you need any additional support when taking part in this research?

	Yes	1	CONTINUE
	No	2	CONTINUE

IF YES, PLEASE RECORD WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED. FOR EXAMPLE, DOING DPETH IN-PERSON, TIPS ON HOW TO USE ZOOM / HAVING A FRIEND, CARER, OR FAMILY MEMBER ATTEND WITH THEM

RECORD FOR INFO – UP TO 6 DEPTHS WITH CARER

CONFIDENTIALITY QUESTIONS

Finally, I need to ask your permission for BEAM and our client Blue Marble to securely store and process your data.

Any and all information provided to BEAM and our client or any other company or persons working on our behalf on this market research project, is strictly confidential and bound to us in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998/ GDPR 2018.

Your details will not be passed on to any third-party company and anything you say or do will be strictly confidential and anonymised in post-research reporting. A report will be made publicly available containing the research findings.

You can withdraw from the research at any time and ask for your data to be deleted, without needing to supply a reason.

C1) Do you consent to BEAM storing and processing your data securely for 3 months? We will never pass your data to any third parties without your permission.

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	CLOSE

C2) Do you consent to Blue Marble storing and processing your data securely for the purposes and duration of this project only? Your data will never be sold or shared with any third parties.

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	CLOSE

C3) The sessions will be recorded to support analysis and preparation of a report. Do you consent to video and audio recordings during the online groups being stored for these purposes until the end of the project? The end client will not have access to your personal data.

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	CLOSE

C4) Are you happy to be recontacted by BEAM or Blue Marble or for further research opportunities?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	CONTINUE

C5) As part of this research are you willing to share any video or audio collected as part of the research in the following ways:



	Yes	No
I agree to audio transcripts being shared with the end client	CONTINUE	CONTINUE
I agree to footage being used internally by Blue Marble for the purposes of the research	CONTINUE	CLOSE

Declaration:

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have understood the information about the project and what's involved.	
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g., anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	
6.	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	
8.	I understand that researchers and the end client will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data.	
9.	I consent to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to assist in the analysis of the data obtained from my responses	
10.	I, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	

Participant:

_____ Name of Participant

_____ Signature

_____ Date

The answers to the questions I've just been through with you will now be shared BEAM who will share these with the research agency, Blue Marble. BEAM will be in touch to confirm you for the research via email, chat to you further about the research on the phone and schedule in your meetings with Blue Marble.

Recruiter Declaration

I confirm that this recruitment screener has been carried out with the respondent named, and that it was done in accordance with the instructions of BEAM and the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society.



Recruiter Name:
Recruiter Signature:
Date:

2. Discussion guide

Objectives:

- To evaluate Wessex Water's vulnerability strategy through the eyes of customers whom it is designed to support:
 - Exploring personal needs when dealing with service providers
 - generally, and with their water company specifically
 - Understanding experiences (and how these meet needs)
 - Evaluating relevant parts of Wessex Water's vulnerability strategy
 - Is the service level offered acceptable?
 - Is it meeting individuals' specific needs?
 - What does a customer facing version of the strategy look like?
 - Are the performance metrics appropriate? Do they consider the performance metrics to be stretching enough?

Moderator notes:

- Before the session, moderator should be familiar with the individual's circumstances/vulnerability, and tailor questions as appropriate throughout the session.
- Specific issues may include but are not limited to:
 - Financially vulnerable (e.g. low income, in debt, on a social tariff) – exploring impact of on finances e.g. buying bottled water, constraints due to financial situation e.g. additional energy costs.
 - Health vulnerable (e.g. physical disability, mental health condition, transient vulnerability) – exploring impact on vulnerability e.g. require water for health issue, constraints due to vulnerability e.g. impact on caring for people with vulnerabilities.
 - Communication and/or accessibility needs (e.g. non-English speaking, BSL, hearing or sight loss)
- With this in mind, moderators should already have in mind which aspects of the 'support framework' will be most relevant for this person.
- Moderator should take care to be flexible throughout the interview, taking note of whether the participant may need to take a short break during the discussion.
- **NB: 'Vulnerable' can be an off-putting term for many customers, please ensure not to use it when speaking with them, talk about 'customers who need extra help'**

When relevant, check with support person/carer for any clarifications

Discussion outline	
1. Introductions	5 mins
2. Exploring personal needs when dealing with service providers	10 mins
3. Intro to Wessex's approach to meeting the needs of customers with additional needs	15 mins

4. Evaluating relevant parts of Wessex Water’s vulnerability strategy (looking ahead to 2030)	15 mins
5. How do Wessex Water deliver services to customers needing extra help	10 mins
6. Overall assessment of strategy	3 mins
7. Wrap up	2 mins

Discussion guide

Introduction (5 mins)

Moderator introduction to Blue Marble:

- **START RECORDING**
- **Purpose of session:** Thank you for joining. Today, we’re having this discussion to help your water company make important decisions to better support its customers.
- **Introduction to Blue Marble:** We are an independent research agency who run research on behalf of different companies and organisations. We are running this research on behalf of Wessex Water but we are not a part of their organisation.
- **Data protection:** this session will be audio and video recorded for analysis purposes. Researchers from Blue Marble may listen to this recording, but it won’t be shared beyond the research teams and won’t be made public.
- **Encouragement:** there are no right or wrong answers so please feel comfortable to be honest with your responses.

To start us off, I would like to know a little bit more about you and what keeps you busy at the moment.

- **Where** do you live?
- **Who** lives at home with you?
- What **keeps you busy**? What does life look like currently?
 - Probe for work, or if unemployed/retired what their usual routines are

Now I’d like to hear a little bit more about your personal circumstances. The people we are talking to for this project have been specially selected because they may have particular needs that could make dealing with utility companies particularly difficult. This is to make the work we are doing as helpful as possible for Wessex Water and ultimately to you too, as a customer.

I understand from your recruitment interview that you are affected by [YOUR VULNERABILITIES]. If you feel comfortable to do so, could you please tell me:

- **For financial vulnerabilities:** How well you feel you are managing to cope with your personal financial situation?
- **For health / transient vulnerabilities:** how this impacts your day-to-day life (including work, family, health)? How does it impact you being able to manage financially?

Exploring personal needs when dealing with service providers (10 mins)

Objective: To explore vulnerable customers' personal needs and priorities when dealing with service providers, their general expectations for support and how often these needs are met.

We are now going to spend some time discussing **recent experiences you've had with any of your service providers, over the last 18 months**. This could include your company for water, electricity, gas, broadband or telephone, plus other organisations like HMRC or your local council.

I'm interested to know about instances where you have **received communication from, or been in contact with, one of these providers**. Examples of this might include arranging further support, when you've experienced a supply issue, or when you've received a bill or other message.

I want to hear about a range of examples where this communication with the company **went well, and times when it went less well**.

In particular, I want to understand **what these companies did, and did not do to support customers** who might need a bit of extra help or support, such as those in circumstances similar to yours.

Experiences with any service provider:

Moderator note: limit discussion to 2 experiences to allow time to probe for more detail. If participant has multiple experiences to draw on ask about the one that provided the best service, and the one that provided the worst. If participant struggles to recall any service providers, prompt on utilities first, such as Wessex Water or their electricity company.

Moderator to listen and probe where their water company features in this conversation. If example is about Wessex Water, make sure to get the full story from start to finish, probe on how they felt at each stage, and what Wessex Water did.

- Tell me about a time when **you were contacted or needed to get in contact with any service provider**, and how this went.
 - *Probe on...*
 - *Reason for getting in touch.*
 - *Level of comfort making contact*
 - *How easy it was to get in touch.*
 - *Who made the contact (yourself vs someone else)? Why?*
 - *Preferred method of making and receiving contact*
 - *Examples of when the company made a special effort to understand or meet individual needs, best practices.*

- *How was the issue addressed? Were you happy with the communication?*
- *Is this a typical experience with [SERVICE PROVIDER]?*
- *Ideas of how companies could improve their service, especially for customers with needs that require additional help/support. (Moderator: prioritise Wessex Water if mentioned)*

Experiences with Wessex Water (if not already covered):

Moderator to get participant to tell the full story from start to finish, probe on how they felt at each stage, and what Wessex Water did.

- Have you ever contacted, or been contacted by, Wessex Water?
- Tell me about a time when **you were contacted or needed to get in contact with Wessex Water**, and how this went.
 - *Probe on...*
 - *Reason for getting in touch.*
 - *Level of comfort making contact*
 - *How easy it was to get in touch.*
 - *Who made the contact (yourself vs someone else)? Why?*
 - *Preferred method of making and receiving contact*
 - *Examples of when Wessex Water made a special effort to understand or meet individual needs, best practices.*
 - *How was the issue addressed? Were you happy with the communication?*
 - *Is this typical?*
 - *Ideas of how Wessex Water could improve their service, especially for customers with needs that require additional help/support.*
- Thinking about your personal circumstances, what do you want companies like Wessex Water to know about you and the additional needs you may have?
- In what ways could companies like Wessex Water best assist you?
- I'm going to read out two different approaches that companies like Wessex Water could take when providing assistance. I'd like you to tell me which approach you'd prefer, and why.
 - Option 1: You tell Wessex Water about your personal circumstance, and they then decide which of their services are appropriate for you.
 - Option 2: Wessex Water promotes all of the services they have available, and you select which ones you feel are appropriate.

Intro to Wessex’s approach to meeting the needs of customers with additional needs (15 mins)

Objective: To understand customer responses to Wessex Water’s approach to meeting the needs of customers who need extra help, and explore how customers want to be assisted.

Moderator note: use this section flexibly for those on the Wessex Water lists, i.e. confirming rather than asking their awareness of support, reminding them what these things are

- Are you aware of any services or additional support available from Wessex Water for people with special needs? *Probe on which services aware of*
- **IF DOES NOT MENTION PSR:** Are you aware of the Priority Services Register, or PSR?
 - **IF UNAWARE:** Priority Services is designed for customers with additional needs who may need extra help. By signing up for free you can choose which services you would like to receive, from help reading your meter to receiving your bill in large print.
- Are you aware of any services or additional support available from Wessex Water designed to help with communication difficulties?
 - **IF UNAWARE:** Wessex Water has a range of services available to support customers who may have difficulties communicating with them – these include providing bills in large print or braille, allowing customers to nominate a contact person to speak with Wessex Water on their behalf, and offering language interpretation services at customer service centres.
- **IF DOES NOT MENTION AND SOCIAL TARIFF SCHEMES/FINANCIAL SUPPORTS:** Are you aware of any social tariff schemes or other forms of financial support?
 - **IF UNAWARE:** Every water company has a range of lower rate tariffs which can reduce your bills if you are on a low income. Eligibility and the level of support varies depending on your water company. Wessex Water’s main low rate tariff, Assist, gives discounts of up to 90% off the annual average household bill. Wessex Water also offers discounts for low-income pensioners, bill cap schemes, debt support schemes, and flexible payment plans.
- We’re now going to talk about Wessex Water’s strategy for supporting customers who might require more assistance.

Show/ read out stimulus – overview of strategy and four overarching principles.

- What are your initial thoughts on these four principles?
- Now we’ll go through each principle in a little more detail. I’ll read out some goals that sit within each area.

Moderator note: Some respondents may not know if these are true or not – in which case check that assuming they are true, are they happy with them?

- Starting off with the first principle, ‘We always go the extra mile’

Show/ read out stimulus – We always go the extra mile.

- Based on your personal experience of dealing with WW, how well do they live up to this principle in practice? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*

Show/ read out stimulus – We are accessible for everyone.

- Based on your personal experience of dealing with WW, how well do they live up to this principle in practice? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*

Show / read out stimulus – We provide an inclusive service.

- Based on your personal experience of dealing with WW, how well do they live up to this principle in practice? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*

Show / read out stimulus – We actively look for signs of vulnerability.

- Based on your personal experience of dealing with WW, how well do they live up to this principle in practice? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*

Evaluating relevant parts of Wessex Water’s vulnerability strategy (looking ahead to 2030) (15 mins)

Objective: To explore responses to the different areas of the strategy relevant to each participant, with a focus on understanding what works and what may be missing. This should establish whether the current service level is acceptable, whether it meets and satisfies individuals’ needs and whether the performance metrics feel appropriate for these services.

- We’re now going to spend some time talking through the different parts of Wessex Water’s plan for supporting customers now and in the future.

Show/ read out stimulus – extra support offered by Wessex Water.

- What are your initial thoughts on this support offered by Wessex Water?
- Have you had any experience with Wessex Water in this area? How was it?
- There are a lot of different aspects of the plan, so we’ll only talk through the ones you feel are most relevant to you.

Show/ read out stimulus – strategy headlines.

- We’re now going to look at the various services that Wessex Water can offer to customers who have particular needs. This slide shows a number of these needs. We won’t talk about all of them - can you tell me which ones you are most interested in, or that you feel are the most relevant for you?

Moderator note: Start with the ones suggested by the participant, if needed can suggest ones most relevant to their vulnerabilities. Aim to talk through around 5 aspects of the strategy, more if time allows.

Moderator note: when reviewing the ‘Power of Attorney’ slide, if needed, can define it as giving someone you know the ability to help you make decisions, or to make decisions, on your behalf. This gives you more control over what happens to you if you have an accident, or an illness, or cannot make your own decisions.

If someone has experience with Power of Attorney, make note as to:

- whether they have PoA for someone else, or gave PoA to someone else
- if the PoA covers health/welfare, financial matters, or both

Show / read out stimulus – slide relevant to each strategy headline chosen.

- First up, we have [strategy headline]. **Read out aspect of strategy.**
- What are your initial thoughts on this part of the plan?
 - What do you think about what Wessex Water is promising?
 - **Moderator note: Run through each promise for the area, probe on participant thoughts of each**
 - Is there anything you think is missing?
 - How achievable do you think these promises are?
 - Have you had any experience with Wessex Water in this area? How was it?
 - **IF ASPECT HAS AN ASSOCIATED PERFORMANCE METRIC:** Do you think that Wessex Water's 2030 commitment for this area is appropriate? Why / why not?
 - Is there anything else you think Wessex Water should be focusing on instead?
 - How would you like to receive information from Wessex Water about these services?
Probe on format, channel, frequency

Moderator note: Repeat questions for additional relevant headline sections, up to 5 as time allows

Show / read out stimulus – PSR future aims.

- Wessex Water has set out a number of goals for their Priority Services Register. This slide details these goals.
- Do you think that these commitments and goals are appropriate? Why / why not?
- Is there anything you think is missing?

How do Wessex Water deliver services to customers needing extra help (10 mins)

Objective: To understand customer responses to existing Wessex Water services and plans for the future, and whether the workstreams feel appropriate and cover the support customers need

- Next, we'll talk about how Wessex Water delivers their services to customers who may need extra help or have special needs. Wessex Water have developed four different workstreams to help them improve the experience for customers who need additional support. I'd like to spend some time talking about the 'Using data wisely' section, and get your thoughts on how you think Wessex Water should use the data they have about you.

Show / read out stimulus – overview of four workstreams.

Moderator note: read out script, be flexible depending on the various needs of the participant, exclude some of the examples if the cognitive load is too high:

- The first workstream is '**Growing partnerships.**' Wessex Water is aiming to increase the number and range of organisations that they work with, to help reach and support their customers better. This includes organisations like Citizens Advice, local foodbanks, and other places that provide services like financial advice. For example, they work with the energy sector to raise awareness of the Priority Services Register, and make sure customers only have to sign up once for this service. They can provide free advertising

for organisations like job centres to raise awareness of their services and want to fund a range of community projects.

- What are your thoughts on this? How sensible do you think this seems? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*
- The second workstream is **'Community engagement.'** Wessex Water wants to work within local communities to talk to customers who otherwise might not have been heard and make it easier for them to access the support they need. For example, they have attended community events like 'Blue Monday' in the Galleries in Bristol, the Wiltshire Money Forum, and energy saving events in Swanage. They want to keep having staff attend events like this, and also want to support and fund community projects through their staff volunteering programme and the Wessex Water Foundation.
 - What are your thoughts on this? How sensible do you think this seems? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*
- **'Using Data Wisely'**. Wessex Water wants to use data to identify and provide a better service for people who may need additional support. For example, they can target eligible groups such as pensioners on low incomes to make them aware of discounts. They have already teamed up with organisations such as National Grid and Taunton Deane Borough Council to support households experiencing health impacts from cold homes. They also want to share data with other organisations so that customers only need to inform one company of their needs - rather than telling all their service providers. To be able to do things like this, Wessex Water needs to collect, store, and manage information about you, and other customers.
 - What are your thoughts on this? How sensible do you think this seems? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*
- The final workstream is **'Improving the customer journey.'** Wessex Water wants to make it as easy as possible for customers to learn about and access the support they offer, through whichever channel is best for them. For example, they have been a dementia friendly business since 2020, and all staff are trained as Dementia Friends, meaning they can help support customers living with dementia to continue living the life they want. They also conduct biannual check ins with customers on the Priority Services Register to make sure they are meeting their needs and are working to make their website more accessible for everyone, as well as offering some self-service features in their customer billing portal.
 - What are your thoughts on this? How sensible do you think this seems? *Probe for experiences influencing opinion.*

Overall assessment of strategy (3 mins)

Objective: To explore overall views of the strategy, and establish what a customer-facing strategy might look like

Show/ read out stimulus – final graphic

- We're now coming to the end of our time today. Thanks for sharing your views so far.
- Based on everything we've discussed, what are your overall thoughts on Wessex Water's plans to improve their services for customers who may need extra support?
 - What part of the plan do you think works the best currently?
 - Is there anything that you think needs to change?
- What would you like to know about Wessex Water's additional services that we've been talking about today? What are the key things they need to communicate to all customers? And how would you like to hear about this?
 - *E.g. booklet, 1-page summary, section on website*
- If you could pass **one final message** back to your water company about their support services, what would you say?

Wrap up (2 mins)

Finally, are you happy for what we've discussed today to be used as a case study for Wessex Water? This may include your experiences being shared in internal corporate communications within Wessex Water. We would remove any personal information, so your identity would be kept anonymous.

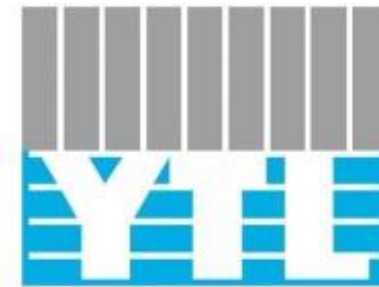
Moderator to outline the relevant support that Wessex Water offer to customers who need extra help/how to check eligibility/contact details/where to find more information.

Thank, confirm incentive details, and close.

3. Interview stimulus

Vulnerability
Strategy
Research

Stimulus Deck



Wessex Water

YTL GROUP

We always go
the extra mile



We are accessible
for everyone

We provide an inclusive
service

We actively look for signs
of extra needs and
requirements



We always go the extra mile:

- ✓ Our staff do all they can for customers
- ✓ Our staff are caring and sensitive when helping customers in ways that suit their needs
- ✓ Our staff are trained to quickly spot when a customer needs extra help and provide immediate support – e.g. a customer is having financial difficulties
- ✓ Our staff will help find the best solution for a customer, depending on their situation, to help make their bills affordable and prevent them falling into debt



We are accessible for everyone:

- ✓ Customers can choose how they want to talk to us, for example over the phone or on a live chat, depending on what works best for them
- ✓ However customers want to talk to us, our customer service team will help them
- ✓ In an emergency, we can text customers to contact them
- ✓ If customers are on the Priority Service Register, we can also visit their home, use an interpreter or 'signlive', or speak to a chosen carer, family member or friend



We provide an inclusive service:

- ✓ We follow guidance from many organisations to make sure we give customers the specific services they need
- ✓ We are endorsed by over 50 organisations for providing an inclusive service
- ✓ We hold a number of awards and certifications for our service e.g. the Customer Service Excellence Award and British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision



Looking for signs of extra needs and requirements:

- ✓ We train our customer service team to look for signs of lots of different needs and requirements
- ✓ Our staff are also trained to be confident in listening and communicating with customers in complicated situations. And, we train our staff to tell customers about support that is available for them
- ✓ We make sure staff have enough time to spend with those who need extra help, by focusing on quality and not on speed when taking care of customers
- ✓ We have experts who share information about our support strategy throughout our teams

Extra support offered by Wessex Water



Some customers need extra help when dealing with Wessex Water day to day, others need help with their bills, and others need both. Wessex Water have a range of additional services to help meet all these needs, including:

- Low-rate tariffs and schemes to reduce ongoing water bills and pay debt
- Delivery of bottled water during a break in water supply
- Providing bills in a different format or language
- Offering a range of ways for customers to get in touch
- Additional water meter readings, and free relocation if needed
- Knock and wait or password service if we visit a customer in their home
- A carer, friend or family member to liaise with us on a customer's behalf



Reasons customers may need extra support

1. Help with water bills
2. Hearing impairment / deafness
3. Dementia / cognitive impairment
4. Mental health
5. Dialysis
6. Blind or partially sighted
7. Pensionable age
8. Physical impairment
9. Digital exclusion
10. Developmental conditions, e.g. autism, Down's syndrome
11. Unable to communicate in English / literacy difficulties
12. Chronic / serious illness
13. Protecting against bogus callers
14. Speech difficulties
15. Power of Attorney
16. Bereavement
17. Families with children under 5
18. Water dependent
19. Require medical equipment
20. Temporary support for things such as redundancy, divorce, post-hospital recovery

Help with water bills



We promise to...

- Make sure water bills are affordable for all – no one should be unable to afford their water bill
- Offer a range of lower-rate tariffs, debt support schemes and flexible ways to pay
- Provide customers with a tailored solution that meets their individual financial circumstances
- Continue to evolve this programme so that it meets the needs of our customers on the lowest incomes now and into the future

By 2030 we commit to:

- Increase the number of customers on our social tariffs from 65,000 to 140,000. No one will be unable to afford their water bills
- Increase awareness of our affordability support from 40% to over 50%
- Continue to fund local community projects across our region to build financial capability and increase access to services
- All customer facing staff become Friends against scams

Hearing impairment / deafness



We promise to...



- Ensure our customer facing staff have deaf awareness training
- Make sure our communications used during an emergency are tailored for deaf/hearing impaired customers
- Ensure our customer help videos are subtitled
- Give staff access to sign language translation apps
- Speak to a nominated contact on behalf of the customer
- Be aware that customers may have information about themselves within their home to share with us e.g. a card by their front door
- Offer hard of hearing customers who wish to use our password scheme the means to do so either through a written password or other communication arrangements

Dementia / Cognitive Impairment (1/2)



We promise to...

- Ensure that all customer facing staff are trained and have an awareness of dementia
- Ensure that all our sites are dementia friendly
- Take part in the national dementia action awareness week each year
- Give those with dementia/cognitive impairments the opportunity to sign up to Priority Services so that any contacts will be tailored to their needs

By 2030 we commit to:

- Continue to be a dementia friendly utility with all customer facing staff Dementia Friends

Dementia / Cognitive Impairment (2/2)



We promise to...

- Speak to a nominated contact, when requested, on behalf of the customer
- Continue supporting the local network e.g. attending events sharing current best practice
- Be aware that customers may have information about themselves within their home to share
- Encourage and support our partner organisations e.g. charities when it comes to best practice in this area

Mental health



We promise to...



- Recognise when to signpost customers to other organisations
- Know the right questions to ask to encourage customers to give us information about their mental health, so we can support them in the right way
- Give those who are experiencing mental health problems the opportunity to have contact tailored to their needs and offer to speak to a nominated person on their behalf
- Continue supporting the local network e.g. attending events sharing current best practice
- Train staff to become mental health first aiders
- Support national mental health awareness week each year

Dialysis



**It is important to note that customers, or their nominated contact, must notify Wessex Water that they are renal patients.*

We promise to...

- Call the customer during an event (such as when the water supply is interrupted (planned or unplanned))
- Deliver free bottled water in emergencies or during planned work
- Send text messages during the time that the supply is off, to ensure that the customer is up to date with accurate information
- Quickly check the quality of our water supply after an interruption event to ensure that it is safe to use for dialysis again
- Work closely with the NHS to support our customers on dialysis*
- Work with Kidney Care UK to reach more customers who may need to be on Priority Services or need help with their bill

Pensionable age (1/2)



We promise to...

- Wait if a customer takes longer to answer the door
- Offer a personal password in the customer's chosen format which we will use every time we visit to help guard against bogus callers
- Ensure that all our staff carry an identification card
- Read the meter up to four times a year, if the customer asks us to
- Look at moving the meter to a more accessible location
- Work with Age UK on providing training for staff to better support the elderly

Pensionable age (2/2)



We promise to...



- Deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues
- Give customers in receipt of Pension Credit or whose only income is State Pension a discount of around £55 on their water bill
- Offer to redirect bills to a carer or family member or friend, if the customer is in hospital, living in residential care or staying with relatives for a long period
- Speak to a nominated contact on behalf of customers

Blind or partially sighted people



We promise to...

- Arrange for water supply interruption notices to be given via telephone or text message
- Provide bills and a selection of our leaflets in large print, or braille
- Read the meter up to four times a year, at the request of the customer
- Take into account the needs of those blind/partially sighted when we are working in the street

Physical impairment



We promise to...



- Read the water meter up to four times a year, if the customer requests it
- Look at moving the water meter to a more accessible location
- Deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues
- Ensure that all our sites with public access are wheelchair friendly
- Wait if the customer takes a little longer to come to the door

Digital exclusion



We promise to...



- Offer a range of communication channels for our customers
- Continue supporting the Keep Me Posted campaign to ensure customers are given the choice in how they receive their bills and statements

If an unexpected incident occurs our Customer Care Team will contact all customers on Priority Services to let them know, find out what extra help they might need, and continue to keep in touch with them throughout the incident.

Developmental conditions



Includes customers with autism, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, and spina bifida



We promise to...

- Offer a range of communication options for our customers.
- If we speak to an autistic customer on the phone, we will check understanding and offer a follow up email to set out what has been agreed
- Offer to redirect bills to a carer or family member
- Offer to speak to a person of the customer's choice instead of the customer
- Ensure our leaflets and other communication methods are jargon free and written in plain English
- Speak in a clear, literal way, avoiding jargon and checking understanding
- Plan with the customer what they should do if something goes wrong or if there is an emergency

Unable to communicate in English / literacy difficulties



We promise to...

- Provide bills and a selection of our leaflets in a preferred language
- Offer an interpretation service at our customer service centres
- Offer to speak to a person of the customer's choice instead of the customer
- Use Google Translate when visiting people in their homes
- Ensure our leaflets and other communication methods are jargon free and in plain English
- Work with third party organisations such as Scope to make sure bills are easy to read and understand

Chronic / serious illness



We promise to...



- Wait if the customer takes a little longer to answer the door
- Read the meter up to four times a year, if the customer requests it
- Offer to redirect bills to a carer, family member or friend, if required. We can also withdraw the water and/or sewerage charges if an unmetered property is unoccupied but furnished
- Provide help with bills and debt if required
- Deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues

Speech difficulties



We promise to...



- Make our services accessible via many different channels including:
 - Live Chat
 - Emails/letters
 - Social media
 - Relay UK text service
- Offer to speak to a person of the customer's choice instead of the customer

Power of Attorney



We promise to...



- Help customers have a nominated point of contact in place before the need for a Power of Attorney occurs
- Offer to redirect bills to a carer or family member
- Treat attorneys as if they are the customer to ensure consistent service levels

Bereavement



We promise to...



- Train all staff to deal with someone going through a bereavement
- Ensure it's easy to notify us and provide the relevant information quickly and efficiently
- Tell customers about free online services that allow them to notify other organisations about the death of a loved one, all at once
- Provide a dedicated online form for a simple way of notifying us of a customer passing away at a time that suits them

Families with children under 5



We promise to...

- Call the customer during an event such as a planned or unplanned supply interruption or a problem with water quality particularly where the customer has a child under 12 months old
- Deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer has a child under 12 months old

Water dependent



We promise to:

- Wait if the customer takes a little longer to answer the door
- Offer to speak to a person of the customer's choice instead of the customer
- Call the customer during an event (such as when the water supply is interrupted (planned or unplanned))
- Deliver free bottled water in emergencies or during planned work
- Send text messages during the time that the supply is off, to ensure that the customer is up to date with accurate information

Require medical equipment e.g. nebuliser, ventilator, oxygen use, stair lift



We promise to...

- Wait if the customer takes a little longer to answer the door
- Read the meter up to four times a year, if the customer requests it
- Offer to redirect bills to a carer, family member or friend, if required. We can also withdraw the water and/or sewerage charges if an unmetered property is unoccupied but furnished
- Provide help with bills and debt if required
- Deliver free bottled water during emergencies or planned work if the customer informs us that they have mobility issues

Temporary support



Temporary support includes support for things like bereavement, divorce, redundancy, and post hospital recovery.



We promise to...

- Be aware of the impact on the customer and treat them sensitively
- Make the customer aware they will be supported temporarily and check in with them after a year to see if they still require our support or have more additional needs

Protecting against bogus callers



We promise to...



- Wait if the customer takes a little longer to answer the door
- Offer a personal password in the format of choice which we will use every time we visit to help guard against bogus callers
- Offer hard of hearing customers who wish to use the password scheme the means to do so either through a written password or other communication arrangements
- Ensure that every member of staff carries a photo ID card
- Wait if the customer would like to verify our staff
- Be part of the local distraction burglary network in the local area
- Follow the UK Water Industry Distraction Burglary Protocol
- Offer friends against scams training to all customer facing staff

Priority Services Register – future aims

**Extra support
when you need it**

Register for **Priority Services**
if you have additional needs



By 2030 we commit to:

- Increase the numbers on our Priority Services Register from 114,000 today to around 290,000
- Increase awareness of Priority Services from 39% to over 50%
- Contact customers on our Priority Services Register every two years to check their needs and details are up to date
- Achieve a score of more than 85% when we ask customers and our partners if they were satisfied with our service and if we met all their needs
- Achieve a number of external accreditations about our service

Growing partnerships

Co-creating initiatives with our partners



Strategy for customers who need extra help

Community engagement



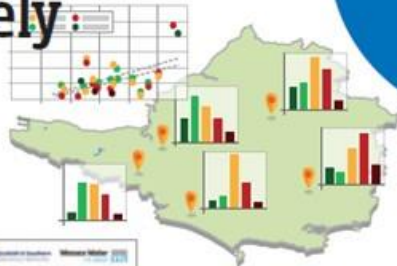
Blue Monday roadshow - Bristol



Helping with the Salvation Army toy appeal

Using data wisely

Collecting and using data to focus help where it's needed most



Sharing data with other utility suppliers so customers only tell us once

Improving customer journey

Helping our staff to understand the effects of dementia



Maintaining the highest standards of customer care

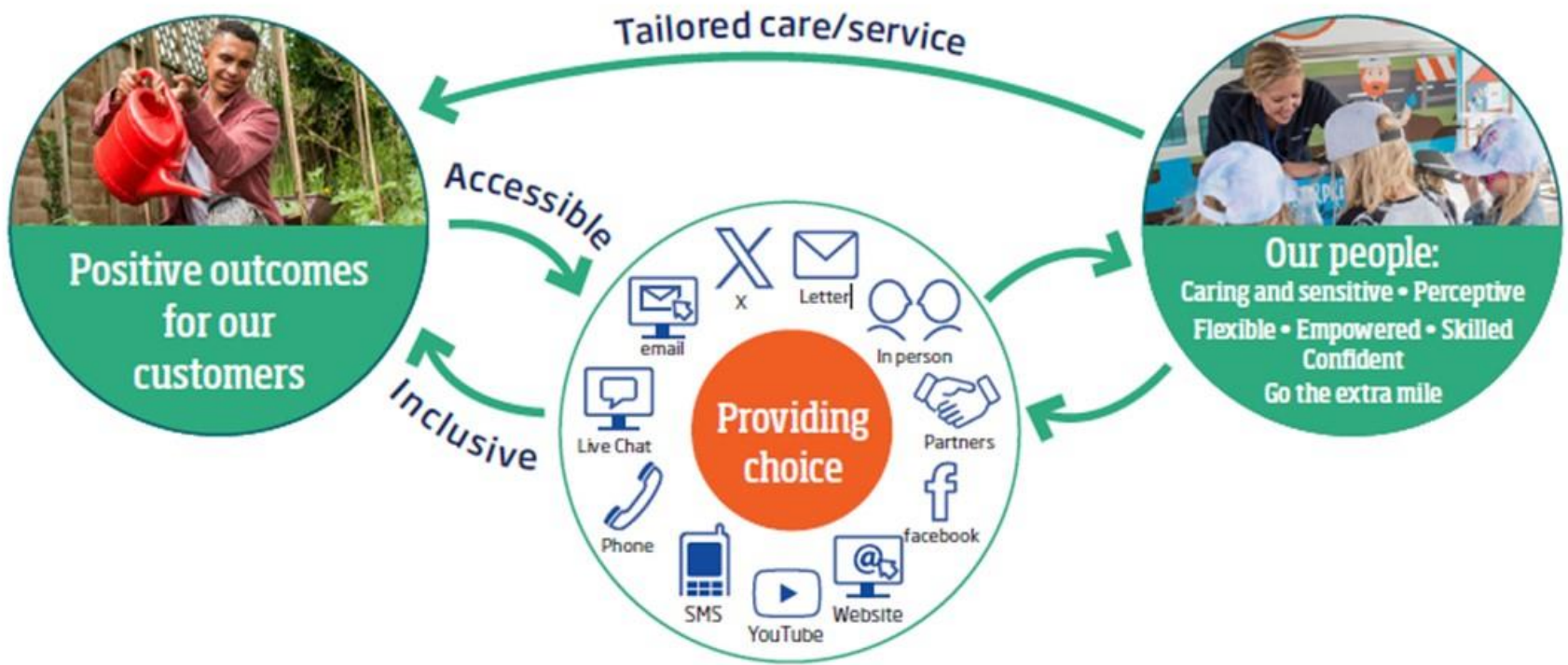


Mapping the customer journey



Supporting customers who need extra help





[END]