



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Citizens' Forum Extension Wave 2 – Consistent Messaging

Report from online community – 19-25 June.

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Foreword



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Earlier this year, CCW [published the findings](#) of the first of its Citizens' Forum research projects. The purpose of these is to test ideas and water-related campaigns to ensure they are communicating the issues effectively to customers and providing clear calls to action, as part of our campaign to help people make the connection between their use of water services at home and water in the natural environment.

For this research, we reconvened our Citizens' Forum for the purpose of developing consistent messaging on key issues for water customers. On topics like saving water by reducing shower time or tackling leaky loos, each water company currently develops its own campaign with its own messages. CCW therefore decided, in the interests of consumers, to convene representatives from water companies via workshops to develop some consistent campaign messages that could be used uniformly across England and Wales.

The ambition is that, by speaking with a single voice, companies' water saving messages will be more clearly understood and trusted – and, ultimately, have a more significant cut-through with their customers.

We found when testing these proposed consistent messages with our Citizens' Forum panel, that consumers welcomed clear, informative messages – particularly when including estimated cost savings through water saving – but that motivation needed to be linked to specific actions. The research also showed that attempts to target messages at a particular group (e.g. families) risk losing wider appeal, with people 'switching off' due to lack of relevance.

We will be using the forum's findings to help refine the proposed consistent messages with companies, making sure that potential consumer benefits are properly emphasised. Furthermore, for topics where the forum found low levels of awareness – for instance how to identify when loos are leaking – the messaging will need remove these barriers through proper context and explanation. This will ensure that these new consistent messages will have the best possible chance to make an impact and lead to a sustained change in how consumers use water on a daily basis.



Executive Summary:



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- CCW have engaged an ongoing Citizens' Forum to help in the development and testing of campaigns and messages. In this wave, messages were explored with a broad spectrum of consumers: examples targeting specific groups resonate e.g. with gardeners, metered water customers, families. However, others often switch off if they see the messages as being irrelevant to them. While consistent messaging across the water industry is the goal, **the research underlines the importance of campaigns with a range of messages tailored to specific audiences.**
- Despite it being a 'warm' sample, findings demonstrate that campaign messaging should not assume very much knowledge on the part of the consumer: e.g. the need to conserve water, how to save water, that toilet leaks can be silent or that showerheads are available free. Low awareness in these areas are all barriers to engage or act. **Longer-form messaging that can contextualise and inform are working well to reframe consumer mindset.**
- While many remain unmoved by the need to conserve water, **additional consumer benefits can strike a chord** e.g. actions that improve plant health; access to trusted tradespeople; how to check if a loo is leaking. These wider benefits help counter the perception that there are only marginal financial gains to be had through changing behaviour.
- Money saving potential is the strongest driver to act: **messages that provide actual estimates of savings work well.**
- **Consumers expect messages to come from water companies and industry bodies** – but this does not necessarily mean they are the optimum messengers. Local voices (council, charities, tradespeople) could lend more weight to messages. With targeted campaigns, product tie-ins or relevant influencers (e.g. for gardeners) better placed to 'interrupt' consumer habits.



Research methodology



Background and Objectives



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Background

- There is inconsistency in UK water industry communications that attempt to achieve the same aim, such as encouraging customers to take shorter showers or to detect and fix leaky loos.
- Across different water companies, there is an array of different messages, data, and facts used in communications.
- Recently, through its sector that works for people work programme, CCW have been working with water companies to develop a set of consistent messages that will be used across the industry.
- In this research, the content of specific messages that had been developed by CCW and water companies was tested with customers.

Objectives

- Explore customer comprehension of the messages.
- Investigate how motivating customers find the messages.
- Understand if and how messages can be adapted to make them clearer or more motivating
- Understand where customers might expect or prefer to see these messages (i.e., channel and means of communication).
- Where possible, explore what resonates with different segments – giving an indication of differences according to age, metering status, areas of water stress and attitude to the environment.



Sample and Method



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- Invited 80 participants of previous Citizens' Forum to complete 'warm up' survey on the topic of water scarcity, drought, and water saving habits.
- The 58 that completed the 'warm up' survey act as pool of respondents to draw upon for each wave, with potential to top up the reserve.
- This wave involved 20 participants comprising a range of attitudes, demographics and circumstances (see table).
- Participants took part in a week-long online community, completing three 30-minute tasks looking at messages on the following topics:
 1. Saving water in the shower
 2. Leaky loos
 3. Water resources in the UK
 4. Saving water in the garden

Sample make up:		
Age	20 – 30	5
	30 – 45	5
	45 – 60	5
	60+	5
Meter	Metered	13
	Unmetered	7
Region	North (UU, NW, YK)	5
	South (SW, WW, SW, TW)	6
	East (AW)	4
	West (WW, STW)	5
SEG	AB	5
	C1C2	5
	D	4
	Vulnerable	6

- Mix of gender, area (rural, suburban, urban), household composition



**Research
findings**



Knowledge of water resources in area



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At the start of the online community, **we explored respondents' knowledge of the water resources status of their local area.**

We were able to **cross check this with customers' postcodes to accurately determine the water resource status** of participants' area:

- Half the sample live in an area defined as 'in serious water stress', with the remainder in an area with 'no serious water stress'.



There is confusion around which areas of the UK are defined as water stressed or what constitutes water stress:

- In the pre-task, most agreed that water scarcity is an issue in the UK.
- Mixed self-reported knowledge of water resources in local area:
 - Most say they 'know a little bit'
 - Remainder split between 'know a fair bit' or 'don't know much'
- **But most of our sample think their local area is 'not seriously water stressed':**
 - This is true for around half the sample.
 - But incorrect for the other half – only one person living in a water stressed area correctly identified the water resource status of their area.



Evaluating messages



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Our rational thought processes are used to comprehend the message:

- Is it easy to understand?
- Is it logical?
- Does it reinforce current perceptions and cultural norms?

If we cannot easily process the message our ability to absorb the intended communication is interrupted.

- As a result, our rational minds will quickly reach the conclusion 'not for me'.

Suggested improvements can include different language, phrasing or explanations

Head



Heart



Who is it working for?

Our emotional processing happens subconsciously triggering both positive and negative feelings (both can be equally effective)

- Behaviour change happens when audience is engaged in the action in question.
- Engagement is driven by emotions such as fear, desire, belonging, self-fulfilment, guilt, duty, pride, interest.
- An emotional response is necessary for communications to feel relevant (conveyed by the message, its execution and the channel or messenger).

Suggested improvements can include a stronger focus on aspects that trigger emotions – tone, benefit, impact/rationale

Shower
messages



4-minute song in shower

"Can you save time off your shower by using one of Waterwise's 4-minute shower songs on Spotify?"



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Message is clear and easy to understand:

- Tip of reducing shower times by showering to a timed song makes sense and sounds easy to do.
- But those who do not have Spotify are left wondering what they can or should do.
- Those who feel they already take short showers do not think this message applies to them.

Suggested improvements can include different language, phrasing or explanations

Head



Heart



Message working better for men than for women. More persuasive for those under 45.

"If the songs are ones I like, then this could be a fun way to save water."

Challenge of 4-min shower has appeal for some:

- Men particularly like challenge of a short shower.
- Less so women who are more likely to:
 - Enjoy and value their routine
 - Feel that 4 minutes is not long enough to complete shower routine

Idea of timing shower by listening to music appealing, but most want a song they know and like.

- Inevitably some simply don't want to listen to music in the shower and prefer silence.

Suggested improvements can include a stronger focus on aspects that trigger emotions – tone, benefit, impact/rationale

Money saving for family of four

“Reducing your shower time by 1 minute could save a family of four up to £160 a year on their water and energy bills combined.”



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Some confusion around the call to action:

- Every family member or just you as an individual – does each family member have to reduce shower by 1 minute?

Positive responses to the saving of £160 per year:

- Figure seen as hard hitting, impressive and a good saving.

Head



Heart



Message best received by those with families.

Seen as a motivating message:

- Especially regarding the financial incentive figure.
- ### Mixed relevance here:
- Particularly relevant for families, less so for non-families.
 - Though some without families still see the water saving message as relevant to them.
 - Some feel that if they don't have a water meter, it doesn't apply.

Suggested improvements:

- Some interest to know how much saving per minute, in reference to one person.

Suggested improvements:

- Potential to increase relevance to those not in a family of 4 e.g. individual saving potential?

“What if I have a family of 3. What would the savings be rather than a family of 4?”



Money saving for family of four

“Water saving shower heads let the water out slower, without affecting the pressure – check out options here.”



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People say the message is interesting because of cost saving implications:

- Many would click on the link
- But also desire to see more initial information in the message.

Willingness to adopt and try out technological solutions and devices:

- But scepticism and confusion about how it can let water out slower but not affect pressure.

Suggested improvements:

- Give a brief and simple explanation of how it works in the initial message.

Head



Heart



Appeal in the abstract – but assurances over costs need to be given to encourage people to switch.

“It will obviously cost people to change their shower heads. A figure of how much would help people decide.”

Broad assumption of upfront cost for water saving shower head affects motivation.

- Don't want to spend money – especially if happy with current shower head.
- Concerns that installation could be tricky also potential hurdle.

But in the abstract, switch to water saving shower head feels like low effort solution:

- Expectation that switch would save money.

Suggested improvements:

- Inform readers that water companies give out water saving shower heads for free.
- Provide information about ease of installation.
- Include information about potential to save money.

Channel and messenger expectations



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Messengers:

No clear consensus about who should deliver these messages:

- **Water companies** are the most obvious messenger:
 - Experts on the topic.
 - Seen as responsible for informing customers about water saving.
- **Government (including local councils) seen as having a role** –intervention increases salience of an issue.
- **Ofwat and CCW seen by a few respondents as having a role to play – viewed as independent and having responsibility for the consumer.**
 - Across a range of message topics and for the similar reasons, CCW is seen by the same few respondents as a relevant messenger – suggesting that those aware of CCW and its role see it as playing a part in delivering messages.
- **Environmental charities well placed to underline the wider benefits of water saving** – trusted to have good intentions for society and environment
- **Plumbers would be able to endorse specific devices – and potentially advise on the practical barriers around installation.**

Channels:

Respondents tend to mention mainstream channels with the broadest reach, thinking that will be the best strategy:

- National TV adverts
- Government intervention
- Radio and print (both national and local)
- Water company bills and leaflets

Observations and considerations:

Context marketing or product tie-ins might be effective:

- Public changing rooms
- Shower / hygiene related brands.

Plus social media campaigns with links



**Leaky luo
messages**



Consumer understanding of leaky loos



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When thinking of a leaky loo, customers imagine the most obvious signs:



- Dripping sound in cistern or constant running noise.



- Water on floor around the cistern or toilet.



- Visible signs of water damage on the floor or below ceiling.

A significant minority do not realise that a leaky loo might not present a visible or audible sign that it is leaking – illustrating a misunderstanding among customers about what exactly constitutes a leaky loo.

Communications around leaky loos need to bridge knowledge gap and explain what exactly constitutes a leaky loo.



Push button toilets

“Did you know push button toilets are more likely to leak? Fixing a leaky loo could save wasting up to 400 litres of water a day, that is the same as taking about five baths a day. Metered households could also save up to £480 a year. Check out our tips to find out if your loo is silently leaking here.”



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Message is engaging:

- Both statistics are surprising and impactful regarding both cost and volume of water wasted, generating interest and engagement.
- But difficult to visualise or comprehend a silent leaky loo.

Information provokes irritation:

- Some express surprise that others might ignore leaks – but have not necessarily checked their own.
- New-found dislike towards push button toilets because of increased likelihood of leaking.

Suggested improvements:

- Some interest in video information about how to detect a silent leaky loo.

Head



Heart



Broad appeal – though slightly less salient for unmetered customers.

“The facts and numbers give the statement more credibility, making me want to take action.”

Positive consensus regarding the message:

- Fact that a leaky loo could waste £480 per year motivates – likely to act and check.
- The link / call to action at the end is needed – many want to click on link to find out more.

Message is relevant and salient:

- Push button toilets are commonplace.
- Metered customers interested in saving money
- But slightly less relevant if not on a meter.

Suggested improvements:

- For unmetered customers, potential to increase relevance by including wider (environmental) impact of water wastage



Advice from water company

“For advice about leaks or any other water saving tips, contact your water company.”



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Assumption that message is encouraging people to ring up their water company to ask for advice:

- A time-consuming and difficult process which people wouldn't do for advice about leaks in their own home.

For many water company not first port of call:

- Many would conduct an internet search for advice or information about leaks.
- Or seek out a plumber.

Head



Heart



Message fails to motivate across the sample.

While there is broad trust in water companies to offer expert and helpful advice on such issues, this message not motivating or persuasive:

- Push to contact/call water company will not work for a topic like this – too much effort.
- If encouraging engagement with water company, preference for a link to an information webpage.

Suggested improvements:

- Change language to remove confusion about calling up water company.

Suggested improvements:

- Include link to water company information webpage about leaks and water saving.

“I am not likely to make the effort of contacting my water company and I would not relish the thought of how much time this would take.”



Tradesperson via Watersafe

"If you think you have a leaky loo, visit the Watersafe website to find a trusted tradesperson in your area, or check if you have insurance that covers it."



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Mostly positive response to message:

- Lays out specific steps to take.
- Good to know for future reference that there is a website where you can find relevant tradespeople for issues with leaks.

But some scepticism about using tradespeople from a website they don't know anything about.

- Fear of being scammed or overcharged.
- Prefer finding tradespeople themselves.

Surprise about insurance – little awareness that insurance might cover a leaky loo.

Suggested improvements:

- Link to Watersafe so people can check website or provide more information about the website to build knowledge and trust.

Head



Heart



General acceptance of message but mixed usefulness.

"It doesn't tell me why or what to look for, or the benefits of me looking on this website. It doesn't explain who Watersafe are."

The tone of the message is well received:

- Informative and advisory without being preachy.
- Appreciation of proactive nature of the message.

Idea of calling out tradesperson just to check whether loo is leaking seems pointless and potentially expensive:

- Fears of call out cost to find no issue.
- Prefer to check themselves if loo was leaking before seeking out tradesperson.
- Or would try find way to fix issue themselves.

Suggested improvements:

- Add resources to show people how to find out if loo is leaking.
- Add context to assuage concerns about cost.



Channel and messenger expectations



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Messengers:

Responses very similar when talking about messengers for behaviour change interventions. Water companies seen as the obvious messengers to talk about the scale and impact of leakage and water wastage.

- Responsibility of local water company to inform customers about water wastage and water-related issues like leaks.

But other sources are raised to support the overarching message:

- For example, Ofwat or Government (but not CCW).

Councils and local government also seen to have a role to play:

- Own and manage properties and engage with landlords.
- Trusted as seen as having the interests of residents in mind.

Plumbers seen as trusted as they are professionals and experts:

- But only able to deliver message after they're called out.
- Potential to encourage or incentivise local plumbers to provide advice and information about leaky loos during call outs?

Channels:

As previously, respondents tend to mention mass media channels with the broadest reach, thinking that will be the best strategy.

Observations and considerations:

- Potential to use variety of targeted approaches to build understanding that leaky loos are commonplace and with potentially big cost impacts
 - Via product tie-ins e.g. loo paper brands.
 - Contextual campaigns (e.g., public toilets).



**Context
messages**



Context messages:



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Context messages both tested well – but illustrate need to empower customers to act by providing water saving tips.

We expect England and Wales's population to further increase by around 3 million people by 2045, this will put an extra strain on our natural water resources.

This means we all need to make a little extra effort to reduce our water use so there is enough water for people and the environment.

Small changes like reducing our shower time by a minute can add up to a big water saving. If everyone in the UK spent one minute less in the shower this would save 56,000 million litres of water every year.

Message tested very well and is persuasive:

- Presents problem and provides solution.
- Includes call to action and gives simple behaviour changes that customers can make.

Statistics lend salience to the issue and drive motivation:

- Hard-hitting, drives home the seriousness of the situation.
- Lend credibility to the statement.
- Illustrate the collective impact of small individual water saving behaviour changes.

Customers empowered to act:

- Gives customers the information they need to act – simple water saving tips like spending less time in the shower



Most of the water you drink in the UK comes from our environment.

Population growth is increasing customer demand for water just as drier summers reduce the amount available.

This combination puts a strain on our water resources and the natural environment they support.

Message motivates but fails to empower:

- Clearly presents a serious problem. But lacks information on what customers can do to help.

Message motivates and is salient, despite lack of stats:

- Water shortage situation worrying and alarming.
- Information is useful – tells people why they need to be mindful of water.

But customers not empowered to act

- Message provides no information about what customers can do to help.



Channel and messenger expectations



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Messengers:

Once again, local water companies are expected messengers:

- Seen as trustworthy delivering this sort of information.
- Ultimately responsible for keeping customers informed.

Ofwat and CCW also have a role in supporting local water companies:

- Ofwat: trusted source and mediator between customer and water companies.
- CCW: independent body whose purpose is to represent customers.

Nature charities also trusted to deliver advice about saving water and protecting the environment:

- Seen as having good motives – want to protect environment and not there to make a profit.

Government can add salience to the issue – involvement illustrates the severity of the situation and can motivate.

Channels:

Locally focussed messages important in targeting water stressed areas:

- Local radio or newspapers – can target and motivate specific communities.

Again, respondents tend to mention channels with the broadest reach, thinking that will be the best strategy.

Channels that have broad reach also seen as useful in prompting wider debate about water resources and water saving.



Garden water saving messages



Garden messages



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By making small, simple swaps we can all do our bit to save water and protect the environment.

- Positive reaction to helping the environment by saving water: feels good and is motivating.
- But what are the 'small, simple swaps'? And 'swaps' is a confusing term.
- While relevant to all, it is a general (vague) message: 'what do you want me to do?'

Install a water butt to get plant friendly rainwater. Rainwater helps plants get nutrients from the soil more easily than tap water.

- Appealing message for gardeners: have healthy plants whilst saving water.
- A useful suggestion: Highlighting how to save water in the garden – and an additional benefit.
- Not relevant to those without a garden or that do not do the gardening.

Garden sprinklers and hosepipes can use up to 1,000 litres of water an hour. That's enough for 12 and a half baths.

- Statistic is shocking and effective: raises awareness of volume of water used by hoses – clear and easy to visualise this amount water.
- Potential to scale up over bigger timescale – or relate to cost.
- Not relevant to those without a garden or that do not do the gardening.

What works and suggestions:

- Appeal to the environment in a broad sense, and the health of people's gardens/plants is motivating.
- Point out where and how people can save water – including tips and suggestions.
- Well-defined statistics can drive motivation to act – illustrate the wastefulness of certain behaviours.
- Desire to understand cost implications of changing behaviours – e.g. cost of water butts and using hose vs can.



Garden messages



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Switch to a watering can to save water. Take off the rose of the watering can and get the water direct to the roots, not on the leaves.

- Easy way to save water – watering cans are commonplace so switch is simple and generates no concerns about cost.
- Some uncertainty about what a ‘rose’ is in this context.
- Some confusion around why people should not water on the leaves.

Switching to a watering can and water butt will save you money if you’re on a water meter.

- Money saving aspect is motivating – but less relevant for unmetered.
- Concern that outlay may reduce financial benefit from water saving.
- Questions around difficulty of installing a water butt.

If you have to use a hose, attach a trigger nozzle, which typically halve the amount of water used.

- Simple switch makes sense and an appealing way to save water.
- Using half the amount of water seems a lot – but no information to back this up.
- Questions around cost of a trigger nozzle.

What works and suggestions:

- Simple tips make sense and are easy to remember.
- Questions and some concern about cost when proposing switching to new kit that people do not already own – include information on price or links of where to buy.
- Inclusion of potential cost saving from proposed behaviours might drive motivation.
- Statistics on how much water the switches could save might motivate.



Channel and messenger expectations



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Messengers:

Garden-related organisations seen as appropriate and trusted messengers:

- Targeting relevant people – gardeners.
- Trusted by people as experts in this area.

Nature charities also selected as messengers by a few:

- Gardening is associated with nature.
- Organisations have the environment and people at the centre of their focus.

As with all messages, local water companies are expected messengers:

- Seen as responsible for keeping customers informed.
- Knows all the information – trusted on such a matter.

Government viewed by some as an effective messenger:

- Seen as consistent – government intervention and contribution with regards to hosepipes (e.g., hosepipe bans and drought) is expected.

Role for Ofwat and CCW – trusted and have customer interest at heart.

Channels:

Garden organisations use a range of channels to communicate with members / followers / customers – potential to harness:

- Physical adverts at garden centres and plant shop (e.g., near hosepipes or watering cans).
- T.V. or radio programmes and magazines dedicated to gardening.

Local community groups seen as useful channels for these messages:

- Trusted by local people and can target specific areas and communities.
- Particularly appropriate for groups engaged in gardening and outdoor activities.
- Potential for partnerships and collaboration between water companies and these groups?



Research summary:



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Overall, the messages tested fairly well – though the research has identified improvements to strengthen these messages, including:

- Where relevant, messages need to target specific groups – e.g., gardeners, metered water customers, families – and use appropriate channels to achieve this.
- Messages need to bridge knowledge gaps in order to achieve desired aim – e.g., on the need to conserve water and how to do so; or that leaky loos can be silent and give no visual signs.
- Money saving potential is a strong driver to act – messages that include estimates of how much money people could save by using less water are motivating.
- Statistics are useful way of bridging knowledge gap – often work well in contextualising water use / wastage and can simultaneously drive motivation if they shock audiences.
- Messages that include a call to action need to provide additional information that empowers customers to act – e.g., easy tips on how to save water; how to get a free water saving device, etc.
- Include links to specific webpages, such as Waterwise or water company websites about leaky loos, so customers can quickly look at relevant information. Push to website unlikely to be effective without link directly in message.
- Where recommending switching to new kit to save water / money – e.g., hose nozzle, water saving shower, or water butt – assuage concerns about upfront cost by including additional information around price or that water companies give them out for free.



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