

# Response to Loss of Water Supply

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

On 22 July 2007 Severn Trent's Mythe treatment works was submerged by rising flood water and subsequently shut down early the next day, cutting off mains water supply to around 140,000 households in Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester. Customers were informed that their supplies could be off for 14 days.

Supplies to all 140,000 households were not fully restored until Thursday 2 August. Over the first week, Severn Trent progressively provided over 1,500 bowsers and set up 15 bottled water outlets.

CCWater commissioned Accent to conduct research to explore customers' experiences, their views on Severn Trent's response to the events and to explore their attitudes towards compensation.

A programme of focus groups were held in five affected areas (Cheltenham, Gloucester, Stroud, Tewkesbury and Upton) and one unaffected area (Coventry) in August 2007.

### **Main Findings**

- Respondents acknowledged Severn Trent's hard work in providing temporary water supplies and restoring their mains water supply. They felt that, for the most part and under difficult and extremely unusual conditions, Severn Trent had done a good job
- Despite this, they felt strongly that the situation should not have happened and, more importantly, that it should never happen again – not just in the affected area but anywhere
- Respondents want to see action regarding Mythe, not just as a reaction to recent flood levels but rather based on the belief that in the future with the predicted increases in extreme weather, flood levels are likely to be significantly higher
- Respondents saw no evidence that Severn Trent had a contingency plan for such a disaster and would like evidence that one is in place. For example, although Severn Trent had responded quickly in distributing bottled water, their management of the location and filling of the bowsers was not considered as effective
- Severn Trent's communication throughout this time was considered to be patchy and inconsistent; which was the area most criticised by respondents in terms of their response to the situation. For example, information regarding the location of bowsers was considered poor; respondents with babies were initially unaware that they needed special bottled water for babies and of the location where they could get this; not everyone received the letter regarding the restoration of mains water supply; customers found it difficult to get through to Severn Trent and, when they did, responses from Severn Trent call centre staff lacked confidence and did not reassure. There was also criticism for Severn Trent's low profile in media communications

- In addition, channels of communication were also questioned. Local radio and Sky Television were mentioned as having been the best sources of information, along with the local ‘grapevine’. Media reporting was felt to have focused more on flood victims perhaps at the expense of those without water supply. There could be a place for lobbying for a clearly defined communications process in the case of a declared disaster (as this was) involving national as well as local media, with clear bulletins and information being given at specified time slots
- Severn Trent now has the opportunity to engage with its customers. The company has probably never had such a high profile among its customers and CCWater should ensure that the potential for dialogue is not wasted. There has been a subtle shift in the relationship and customers both want to speak to and listen to Severn Trent
- Vulnerable people appear to have been provided for. The Red Cross and other volunteer groups had helped distribute bottled water and people had ‘looked out for’ their more vulnerable neighbours. However, under these exceptional circumstances, ‘vulnerable’ took on a new meaning. Now, as well as the elderly or chronically sick, it included babies who could not drink the standard bottled water and anyone else who had no access to transport or was not strong enough to carry water
- For respondents in affected areas the experience was regarded as a “wake-up call” as to how precious water is and there was a very strong sense of valuing water more, with many respondents saying they had implemented, or would now implement, water saving measures. It is not possible to say how long term this attitude will be. However, some also said that Severn Trent should see this as an opportunity to emphasise to its customers the importance of water saving
- The majority of respondents in the affected areas did not want compensation as it was felt that this would result in the dissipation of funds that should be directed towards ensuring continuity of supply for the future. Respondents in unaffected areas thought that a refund for supplies not received rather than compensation might be more appropriate, as a goodwill gesture. However, this was half-hearted, and the overwhelming view among all respondents was that money would be better spent on ensuring that such an incident never happens again
- Response to Severn Trent’s offer of £3.5m for community projects met with a mixed reception. Many were cynical as to the company’s real intention and the real value of the offer. A small number felt that some community resources such as Gloucester football ground should be helped by Severn Trent or that the money should go to vulnerable people who had also been flooded. However, all agreed that £3.5m was not a large sum of money.

## **Recommendations**

The key message for CCWater to take back to Severn Trent is that they must learn from the mistakes they made in not protecting Mythe sufficiently and in the quality of their subsequent response to the flooding of Mythe.

There were a number of notable areas where CCWater could direct their actions, most particularly they could:

- work to ensure that areas of responsibility are clearly defined and communications improved between the several agencies responsible for dealing with the flooding and the resulting loss of water supply eg local councils, national government, the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water
- lobby for a clearly defined communications process in the case of a declared disaster (as this was) involving national as well as local media, with clear bulletins and information being given at specified time slots
- seek assurance that Severn Trent (and other water companies) have reviewed their sites, assessed their vulnerability to extreme weather and taken any necessary action
- encourage Severn Trent to demonstrate to customers that they are making the necessary improvements to their infrastructure to ensure continuity of supply in the future
- encourage Severn Trent to demonstrate to customers that they have a disaster recovery plan in place
- encourage Severn Trent to build on, and improve, the dialogue they currently have with their customers through their unprecedented relationship with their customers in recent weeks.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

On 22 July 2007 Severn Trent's Mythe treatment works was submerged by rising flood water and subsequently shut down, cutting off mains water supply to around 140,000 households in Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester. Customers were informed that their supplies could be off for 14 days.

Supplies to all 140,000 households were not fully restored until Thursday 2 August and not declared fit to drink until Thursday 7 August. During the first week, Severn Trent progressively provided over 1,500 bowsers. Whilst 1950 bowsers were actually provided, only around 1500 were in service at any one time due to vandalism problems. There were numerous reports of missing and vandalised bowsers, but also of empty bowsers not being topped-up quickly enough.

In addition to bowsers, Severn Trent also set up 15 bottled water outlets. The security and emergency measures direction requires water companies to provide a minimum of 10 litres per person per day in emergency circumstances. Severn Trent reports that it provided 20 litres per person per day and in total distributed 3 million litres of bottled water each day.

The company's response to the incident appeared initially to be slow, and promises to refill bowsers were not met partly because the large tankers could not negotiate the narrow streets of Gloucester and Tewkesbury. The request nationwide for smaller lorries to fulfil these commitments went out on Wednesday 25 July. Severn Trent had hoped to fill each bower three times per day, although some people had heard that the company intended to re-fill five times per day.

Also, as Severn Trent was not readily aware of which areas were receiving water from Mythe, some villages in Stroud were forgotten. Communications to affected customers appeared to be mainly through the media but the website and telephone information line was considered up-to-date and informative.

Under normal circumstances of unplanned interruptions to supply on a strategic main, domestic customers receive an automatic payment under the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS): £20 for the first 48 hours, and £10 per subsequent 24 hours. However, this does not apply in circumstances of extreme weather. Severn Trent discussed this issue with Ofwat who confirmed that under such extreme weather GSS did not apply. Severn Trent then confirmed that it would not pay compensation through this route.

From CCWater's visits to the area and from conversations with customers who had contacted them, they felt that customers had been very inconvenienced by this event. However, it was not clear what customers wanted in return for the inconvenience they had suffered. CCWater therefore wanted to talk to consumers in the affected areas, and an area that was not affected by the flooding, in order to help them to understand the experiences of customers, how they thought Severn Trent performed and whether they thought that Severn Trent's reputation had been damaged in any way. If they did think that the company's reputation had suffered, then CCWater wanted to know what

customers thought Severn Trent should be doing to restore its reputation with the community and customers.

The outcomes from this research will help CCWater to understand better how customers perceive these kinds of events and whether they feel that supply incidents resulting from flooding should give rise to monetary compensation or other company funded initiatives. If customers do want to see action from Severn Trent, the findings will add weight to CCWater's message to the company and support their principle of being an evidence-based organisation. The outcomes will also provide CCWater with the evidence that they can build on should other events like this occur nationally in the future, and also to feed into the independent review of this incident.

## 1.2 Objectives

The overall business objectives of the research were to:

- inform CCWater on customers' experiences during the recent flooding and subsequent loss of mains water supply in the Gloucester area
- understand consumers' perceptions of Severn Trent's response to the incident and whether they feel that there is more Severn Trent could have done
- inform CCWater of what, if anything, customers want as compensation for the loss of mains water supply they suffered
- understand any differences of opinion about loss of supply between affected and non-affected consumers.

The specific research objectives were to:

- explore access to information issues, particularly customers' perceptions of how Severn Trent communicated with them
- explore how effective Severn Trent was in providing temporary supplies to customers and keeping them updated
- understand the impact that the loss of water supply had on customers and the level of inconvenience they experienced
- inform CCWater about what customers want to see change as a result of the loss of water supply and whether they feel that compensation would be appropriate, or some other monetary payment from Severn Trent that could be invested in community schemes
- explore, if customers do want compensation, how much they feel would be appropriate

- explore whether they would still want that money if it meant that water bills would rise in the future (as a result of the company incurring greater risk).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A programme of qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate to address the objectives of this study, which required some probing and discussion of complex and emotive issues.

A series of focus groups were conducted in five areas that were severely affected by flooding and, as a control, one area that was not affected:

- affected by loss of supply:
  - Cheltenham
  - Gloucester
  - Stroud
  - Tewksbury
  - Upton upon Severn
- not affected by loss of supply:
  - Coventry.

The topic guide was piloted at Gloucester on Monday 13 August, with the remainder of the groups taking place on the evenings immediately after that. One focus group was conducted in each area each evening. Fieldwork finished on Tuesday 21 August and the top line findings were presented to CCWater on Wednesday 22 August.

The topic guide for affected areas is attached as Appendix A and the topic guide for the unaffected area is attached as Appendix B.

## 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1 Severn Trent's Response to Loss of Supply

#### Key Findings

- Respondents acknowledged Severn Trent's hard work in providing temporary supplies and restoring the water supply and felt that, for the most part and in difficult and extremely rare circumstances, they had done a good job
- Prompt distribution of bottled water was considered good. However, there was considerable dissatisfaction with the administration of the bowzers: customers were not confident that Severn Trent had taken population density into account when they selected their locations, neither were they confident that they knew where they had, in fact, positioned them
- Respondents felt strongly that the situation should not have happened and, more importantly, that it should never happen again. They saw no evidence that there had been a contingency plan for such a disaster and want evidence that one is now being put in place for the future

#### Provision of Temporary Supplies

Respondents in affected areas were very understanding about the scale of the problems Severn Trent had to deal with and recognised that they had worked as hard as they could in the face of difficult and extremely unusual conditions.

Respondents thought the company had done everything it could to restore mains water supplies as quickly as possible.

One respondent said that he had bought a lot of bottled water because it was not known initially that bottled water would subsequently be distributed free of charge; he had not found this out until the first Thursday after the mains supplies were cut-off. Another respondent had not known that special bottled water with a lower sodium content had been made available for babies. However, respondents were mostly satisfied with the provision of drinking water. Bottles of drinking water had been distributed promptly and, since some respondents said they still had them, in sufficient quantity.

*"[Water supplies] were [organised] very quickly. We got more water Monday night and I think the bowser was there on Tuesday. Yes, it was within 24 hours.... It was very good."*

Upton

Respondents said that in the early days customers had taken more water than they possibly needed, but suggested that this was because of uncertainty over future water supplies. Once they realised that they could always get more bottled water, they were more reasonable.

The volunteers who helped distribute the bottled water were praised at the same time as noting Severn Trent's absence or, at least, their low profile.

*"There was a band of young people aged anything from 15 to 25 offering to put it in the car for you...they were top notch. They deserve a medal...I don't think Severn Trent were there. I never saw them."*

Cheltenham

There were mixed levels of satisfaction with the bowsers. For some respondents, the bowsers were delivered promptly, were easy to access and were kept filled up.

*“Severn Trent Water put the big lorries out then they had to tip it into a smaller lorry so they were doing twice the work, they needed the little lorries to get through the streets. I think they did very well personally.”*

Upton

Many, though, were less satisfied with the locations, maintenance and security of the bowsers. Some queried whether Severn Trent had a strategy for the placement of the bowsers.

*“Obviously, there was no plan...and the siting of the bowsers was haphazard. There were areas that were bereft of them, and the refilling of the bowsers was haphazard, until the Army [became involved].”*

Cheltenham

*“Once the bowsers were out, they were not refilled. Some people went to nine or ten bowsers and were out for three hours an evening, looking for water in a bowser.”*

Cheltenham

During their discussion, Stroud respondents revealed that not everyone had been aware that only the blue bowsers contained drinking water, indicating a lack of firm communication to customers regarding the temporary supplies.

There was also concern about the lack of control on water allocation per household.

*“You got 4 litres per person per day... but there were people abusing it. [People with] shopping trolley loadfuls trying to flog it.”*

Upton

There was a perception that the bowsers had been placed randomly, sometimes in locations that were difficult to access and with little regard for the population density. For example, some streets had three or four bowsers located within easy reach while other areas, for example where there were more flats than houses, had only one or two that were considered accessible.

Although lists of locations were published on Severn Trent's website, not all customers had access to this and some spoke of simply driving around until they found one, or one that was full.

There was also a perception that Severn Trent had not kept a record of where they had placed the bowsers. This view arose from the fact that some were not filled and, when asked for information on the nearest bowser, Severn Trent was unable to give precise location details.

There were problems with the tankers that were sent to refill the bowsers being too large to negotiate the streets where they had been placed, so that smaller lorries were

subsequently ordered. This clearly delayed many bowzers being refilled. One respondent said he had seen Severn Trent staff refilling a bowser with bottled water.

Security of the bowzers was a concern. For example, respondents reported people pouring bleach or urinating into the bowzers. They felt that the bowzers should have been securely capped and locked from the beginning. Respondents concluded that if, as they thought, Severn Trent did not know the location of individual bowzers, they would not be able to give the relevant keys to the teams responsible for refilling them. In this regard, they felt that customers had been victims of Severn Trent's poor organisation.

That poor organisation was only resolved, it was suggested, when the army became involved.

*“My opinion was that, until the army arrived, Severn Trent were absolutely hopeless. The army appeared and they set up on the racecourse and suddenly it all started to happen.”*

Cheltenham

One Gloucester respondent had been impressed when, he said, Severn Trent “admitted defeat” over the operation of the bowzers. The council, police and fire brigade then took over, supported by volunteers. Although the management of the bowzers then improved, it seems there were still some problems with no clear chain of command between the various bodies involved.

Cheltenham respondents criticised the borough council for not appreciating the severity of the problem, not responding quickly enough and for not working with Severn Trent to resolve the problems.

## **Vulnerable and Elderly Customers**

Respondents said that people had looked out for their neighbours and the local radio had encouraged people to make sure that vulnerable people were being looked after. One respondent who was a GP suggested that available lists of vulnerable people were not initially referred to. His practice, for example, has a database of vulnerable people.

However, respondents said that bottled water had been delivered to neighbours they knew to be elderly or disabled. The Red Cross had also delivered water and food items to elderly people.

## **Restoration of Supply**

Respondents felt that Severn Trent had performed well in its initial response to the situation. They had responded speedily and coped with what were perceived by respondents to be difficult logistical problems.

*“They had an immense amount to cope with. We have the benefit of hindsight.”*

Gloucester

*“They worked really hard, all through the night.”*

Tewkesbury

*“I think that the big picture response was impressive. The speed with which they managed to get the resources together, the distribution going, Cobra brought the Army in and people were advising on that aspect. But I mean it did happen fairly quickly and when you actually look at the area on the ground with the number of people that they were trying to supply, it was a big area.”*

Upton

Respondents knew that Severn Trent workforces had worked through the night in order to restore supplies. One respondent had actually witnessed them.

*“I bumped into two Severn Trent Water guys at the end of the alleyway near where I live and it was in the middle of the night, it was about 3 o’clock in the morning. They said ‘We’re just releasing this valve, we’re trying to get water across from Strensham to you here’. ... They were doing their job in the middle of the night. So all credit to the fact that they were out working.”*

Upton

Despite the criticisms regarding the organisation of the bowzers and the lack of information, respondents felt that Severn Trent had done a good job in restoring mains water supply as quickly as possible.

*“If you’re looking for a more critical perspective, you’re in the wrong place.”*

Upton

## **Disaster Recovery Plan**

Respondents felt that all essential services such as water and power should have in place contingency plans to deal with potential disasters but questioned whether or not Severn Trent had such a plan in place. Some assumed they must have had but, even if that were the case, it had not been communicated to customers and, moreover, had not been successful. Most assumed – from the evidence – that there had been no such plan but queried how this was possible. They thought that all essential services should have a contingency plan in place. As one respondent said:

*“You can be sure they have a business continuity plan for their offices in Solihull.”*

Coventry

*“I think all the rescue services and all these people they did extremely well but what I wonder is, did they prepare in advance if something like this happened? Was there anything that was already set up that they could say okay, this is an emergency. This is what we’ll do. That’s what they should have had.”*

Upton

Many respondents felt that there had been no evidence that Severn Trent had any contingency plan in place. They would now like to see evidence that such a plan is in place.

*“The government should say, you control the water and there must be minimum standards. This is the worst case scenario – do you have a plan?”*  
Gloucester

## 3.2 Customer Response to Loss of Supply

- Customers had shown great resourcefulness in dealing with the loss of water supply
- For respondents in affected areas the experience had been a “wake up call” to how precious water is and there was a very strong sense of valuing water more now
- Many respondents said they now had, or now intended to, implement water saving measures

### **Coping with the Loss of Supply**

There was a feeling among respondents that people had come through the situation because of their own resourcefulness and tenacious spirit, as much as through any action on the part of Severn Trent.

In what respondents described as “a third world situation” or “a return to the dark ages”, customers looked out for their neighbours, particularly the elderly or less able, and fetched water for them. There were, one Gloucester respondent said, “many acts of kindness”.

Some respondents had filled up their bath with water when they first heard that there was likely to be a loss of water supply so that they could, at least, flush the toilet – the major concern for everyone. A small number of respondents suggested that they would have been happy to have received a supply of non-drinkable water so they could have continued to flush their toilets.

Respondents in Stroud had not expected to lose their mains water supply as they were further away from the flooded area. Most Stroud respondents only found out they had lost their water supply after it had happened and had therefore not been able to store up any water.

Respondents shared anecdotes that showed great resourcefulness. For example, some had cut their down pipes to collect rainwater from the guttering into dustbins or wheelie bins (and one said that he had now replaced the bin with a water butt). A respondent who had a hammock in his garden emptied collected rainwater into buckets. Others talked of collecting water from streams or brooks. This provided them with at least the means of flushing their toilet.

A couple of respondents said that, on a day when there was a downpour, they had rushed outside with shampoo to wash their hair in the rain. Another said they had washed in rainwater.

One respondent said his young son’s potty training had been put on hold.

Respondents in the rural locations felt that they had been better off than those in towns insofar as they had better resources on hand to help them cope.

*“In rural communities, a person’s got water butts. We never used anything other than the water butts to flush the loo but my daughter living in Gloucester, she was using bottled water to flush the loo. That’s from one extreme to the other.”*

Upton

Respondents were also aware that many had suffered more than simply a loss of water supply. Others had lost power as well and, of course, many others had also been flooded.

*“When you compare the relatively minor inconvenience of having no water and then look at the suffering, and it is suffering in a big way, that other people have got, I just thought, well, aren’t I lucky? So no, there was no anger.”*

Cheltenham

## **Impact on Business**

A number of respondents had lost money as a result of the loss of water supply, particularly those working in the food sector. Respondents who ran bars or coffee bars, for example, had had to close, while a musician lost work because the places he normally played in were unable to open.

Another respondent who works in a medical laboratory said that although emergency water had been brought in for the analysers, they had operated on an emergency basis because half of the staff were unable to get in to work.

One mentioned that GCHQ had gone, “on to short staffing levels and sent lots and lots and lots of people home”.

*“Yes, to tell you the truth I’m not too fussed about compensation. It’s just it was very inconvenient and the fact that we didn’t get any of the information until 2 or 3 days after, that was annoying but I’m not fussed about that because I’m insured, I will get something back for the business lost.”*

Upton

Those businesses which closed did so mostly because they could not provide clean lavatory facilities. One Cheltenham respondent said her company had been “very, very innovative”. They had fed hosepipes from large water containers into the flush boxes to keep them filled. Staff had kept the water containers full from the boss’s swimming pool.

## **Valuing Water as a Resource**

Respondents’ relationship with water had changed dramatically as a result of this experience. They spoke of spending up to an hour a day thinking about where they were going to get their water each day and, perhaps, another couple of hours actually sourcing it.

As they adapted to having to go without baths and showers and resort to strip washing, respondents said they had become very aware of the amount of water they typically use.

*“Two bottles of water – that’s enough for a wash.”*

Tewkesbury

*“The biggest shock I had was the first morning I had to use bottled water to put the kettle on or to have a wash, was how much water we actually use. That’s what brought it home to me more than anything. You just turn the tap on and it’s there.”*

Cheltenham

*“I was just staggered at how much we actually use. If you had to carry a two-litre bucket just to flush your loo, and then when you think you have a bath or shower, all of that is water going down which, if you had to lug it up, it takes for ever, doesn’t it?”*

Stroud

Respondents said they now limit the amount of water into the flush boxes, take showers instead of baths and use washing up water to water their plants.

*“On day two I put a brick in the cisterns because you could then flush with much less water and I was thinking to myself, when the water came back, shall I take the bricks out?...I’ve left them in.”*

Stroud

Respondents said spontaneously that the Mythe situation had been a “wake up call” that made them see that water is a precious resource that should not be taken for granted. A number of respondents also suggested that their water bills should be higher, although it should be noted this was not a universal view.

*“I know they’re making phenomenal profits but, if we look at what we’re paying a year for our water compared to our rates, in my opinion we’re paying nothing for what we’re getting. The amount of water we’ve actually used through bottled water has brought home to me more than anything the amount of water I’m using for my £200 or £300 a year I’m paying.”*

Cheltenham

*“I probably shouldn’t be saying this but when I think about the money I pay for it, it actually seemed pretty good value really.”*

Stroud

### 3.3 Securing Water Supply in the Future

- Respondents felt strongly that the situation should not have happened and, more importantly, that it should never happen again
- They want to see action regarding Mythe, not just as a response to recent flood levels but based on the assumption that in the future flood levels could be significantly higher

Respondents felt that, in an area that floods regularly, the recent severe flooding had been “a time bomb, an accident waiting to happen”. They said that the water supply infrastructure was Victorian, poorly maintained and lacked investment. They perceived this situation to have been exacerbated by the need for the water company to make huge profits to benefit their shareholders.

However, respondents suggested that, given weather reports and predicted increases in extreme weather, Severn Trent had been careless in allowing themselves to be taken by surprise at Mythe.

Older respondents remembered the Mythe plant flooding in 1947 and younger respondents were aware of it. There was criticism of the fact that the plant had then been protected to a level of only three feet higher than the 1947 flood level. Respondents now want Mythe to be protected substantially higher than the most recent flood level. They expect extreme weather to continue and, potentially, increase.

Respondents were critical of current measures taken which they did not think were a suitable or long-term response to the problem of flooding.

*“They’ve built a barrier, a wire cage and filled it full of soil...It’s like the Army use in Basra...It’s a temporary thing. Well semi-permanent I think...10 years they’ve said. It’ll last for 10 years...But they’re going to have to invest in a proper defence...I hope so.”*

Upton

Some respondents suggested that maintenance of the drains was poor, that the Severn was not dredged sufficiently and that building on flood plains was excessive, all of which had contributed to the severity of the flooding.

Yet the overriding concern now was planning for the future.

*“Have Severn Trent learnt and will they take note of what’s happened or will they say it was exceptional circumstances?”*

Cheltenham

As everyone agreed, “this must never happen again, here or anywhere”.

While Severn Trent was seen to have been irresponsible in failing to protect Mythe, in an area where flooding is not unusual, respondents felt that a review of the situation was very much overdue.

*“I don’t think this is anything to do with global warming and if you read the issue of flooding in the area, we’ve had major floods in this area every month of the year. I think our problem is that if they’re putting flood barriers up in Shrewsbury and it’s coming down that river, it’s got to go somewhere...It’s going to the next place...And it’s going down to the easiest flood plain which is us. Now I think they should look at areas along the river which can be used better as flood plains and I mean they’re building [on them]. The building is just ridiculous and we’ve all done this for years haven’t we? It’s all to do with water.”*

Upton

### 3.4 Communications

#### Key Findings

- Severn Trent's communication was considered patchy and inconsistent; this was the area most criticised by respondents in terms of Severn Trent's response to the situation
- The 'grapevine', local radio and Sky News were considered the best sources of information; however, customers wanted a definitive source of information
- There was disappointment at Severn Trent's low profile in terms of communication

#### Channels of communication

The general view was that communication could have been much better.

*"I think Severn Trent could have used the media better. They could have used Sky News on the hour every hour. They could have given us [their predictions that] this is what's expected or even maybe every 2 hours, this is what's coming. I think they could have used it better."*

Upton

Severn Trent was widely criticised for the way it had communicated information to its customers. Respondents felt that they had not been given sufficient warning of what they might be facing nor what they should do when, in fact, they did lose water supply. Stroud respondents were particularly dissatisfied with the quality and accuracy of communication. There was initial confusion as to whether they would or would not lose supply and even confusion in acknowledging that they actually had lost their water supply.

For many respondents the poor quality of the communication undermined all other efforts to deal with the situation.

*"I have no problem with Severn Trent, just the information."*

Gloucester

*"I kept saying to my husband, 'Well, it's not going to happen yet because nobody official's told us."*

Cheltenham

*"There was absolute panic because of the lack of information coming out."*

Stroud

Respondents had mostly gained their information regarding the loss and eventual restoration of mains water supply from the radio, from television or through the 'grapevine'.

*"There's always somebody who's listening to the local radio who's going to call somebody else. I heard from somebody who was actually in Yorkshire at the time...and somebody else would find out because they*

*were queuing up in Sainsbury's wondering why everybody was buying water."*

Cheltenham

However, these channels of information were not entirely accurate. Stroud respondents complained that, although they had lost main water supply, the local radio was not reporting it because they were not "officially off". Nor were these media sufficiently inclusive. For example, some respondents did not have access to a radio or television, perhaps because they were out of the house or because they had also lost electricity supply.

*"When a company notes that their water works is getting flooded, they should know that at some point their water is going to go off and they should at some point tell their customers that the water's going off in an official way. And of course we all found out through the grapevine. So I'm quite annoyed about that, to be honest."*

Upton

Respondents revealed differences among themselves in the timing and content of information received. Some had seen items they described as 'informative' or 'very good' on television in the middle of the day involving Severn Trent and Gold Command but others, who may have been out during the day, were not aware of these programmes.

Sky News was considered to have been better than BBC television news, whilst Radio Gloucester, Severn Sound and Star Radio were also mentioned as good sources of information.

Many respondents were already regular listeners of local radio but some were new listeners. Perhaps because of this, the number of different sources of information was seen by some as potentially confusing.

*"When you say local radio, is that BBC Radio Gloucestershire?...The question I'm trying to ask is, was one of them more responsible and accurate than the other?"*

Cheltenham

For regular and new listeners alike, local radio was felt to be the most in touch, mostly because of its phone-in format.

*"People can actually ring in and give information and they relay that back to the town, and that was working very well."*

Cheltenham

Some respondents complained that they had not seen or heard from anyone from Severn Trent on the television or radio. Instead, all information had been relayed to them by reporters. Perhaps worse again was that some had heard that Severn Trent were not available to give any information.

*"I was listening to Star Radio...They said they had tried to contact Severn Trent to get some up-to-date information and they were unable to contact them."*

Cheltenham

Respondents had felt initially that it might be difficult for Severn Trent to contact every customer individually to warn them that they might lose supply. The subsequent arrival of a letter from Severn Trent thanking customers for their patience, confirming that the tap water was not potable and explaining that they would not be paying compensation illustrated that communication was possible.

However, with hindsight this had not been a totally reliable approach (and had been hindered by a postal strike). Respondents had received this letter on different days and some had not received this letter at all. Some had only treated the water as safe to drink when they had actually received the letter; others had done so on hearing from other sources that the water was safe to drink and before they had received their own letter. It was suggested that a simple information flyer distributed door to door would have been quicker and more effective.

Some respondents had gained information from notices posted at water supply points.

Some respondents had wondered why Severn Trent had not driven around with loudhailers to ensure that those without access to radio or television were kept informed. As with the letter, the subsequent use of loudhailers by Severn Trent announcing the restoration of safe water supply showed that this could have been possible.

As a consequence of seeking information, more customers accessed Severn Trent's website than usual and there were complaints that, because of this, it was down for quite a time. The website did show lists of bowser locations. However, these were not set out clearly (they were all in upper case), postcode references were included for some but not others and there were no maps.

*"I went to the Severn Trent website thinking they'll just have a simple map or something with the details [of loss of supply]. There was absolutely nothing."*

Stroud

A small number of respondents suggested that the website should be more interactive, allowing customers to have their say. For some, the information on the website was not clear, particularly relating to the locations of the bowsers. In terms of updates, however, it was considered to be successful.

*"We found the most accurate means of communication was their website all the way through. It was renewed regularly."*

Upton

However, not all customers had access to the Internet. Some simply do not have it, some only have access at work, and some had lost connection in any case. One respondent said that he normally accesses the Internet at his local pub but that, too, lost its connection.

## **Content of communications**

While some respondents said they had been given all the information they needed, others were less satisfied as they felt that the information they received was contradictory.

*“The headlines said the water would be back on in 48 hours...On Tuesday they said we think it will be out for seven days. On Wednesday they said 72 hours...The TV news and reality were not related.”*  
Gloucester

In terms of guidance on how customers should behave, some respondents had heard that they should not fill their baths with water. Others had heard this, but did it anyway. Others had not heard this advice at all.

*“The Severn Trent person that was on the radio on Sunday afternoon saying Mythe treatment works is going off. He specifically said don't save any water because we'll get stuff out as soon as possible, bowsers and stuff. He just said don't fill your baths, don't fill up pans.”... “It was too late, mine was full.”*  
Upton

In another instance of inadequate information, one respondent said that he and his family had eventually moved out of the area to stay with his mother because they had run out of the fresh water for his baby. He was frustrated to be told by a fellow respondent that she had been distributing special bottled water that was suitable for babies.

Some respondents were unhappy that they had not been advised that when tap water was initially restored, it should not be used for washing up. Some respondents had used it for washing up, another had also used it for showering and cooking before receiving advice on its possible use.

## **Contacting Severn Trent**

Among those respondents who had tried to contact Severn Trent there were reports of never getting through or of being put on hold for too long (eg 47 minutes, or one hour) while those who managed to speak to someone were often not satisfied with the response as it was typically felt to be unclear.

*“I think we tried about 4 or 5 times on the Sunday. When we eventually got through, they said we're not quite sure what's going on but we think your water's going off.”*  
Upton

Similarly, a query to Severn Trent as to whether the tap water was safe to drink if it was boiled met with the response “We don't know, so we have to say no”. While this may have been true, it was seen to convey a sense of uncertainty to the customer who wanted a more definitive response.

A business customer who was very keen to do whatever he could to provide a temporary water supply had called to ask if there were bowsers specifically for

businesses; if not, could he rent one or, failing that, could he rent a standpipe. He was told that someone from Severn Trent would call him back, but no one did.

Some respondents were unhappy that, when they did call Severn Trent, they had to use an '0845' number and not a free number.

## 4. SEVERN TRENT'S REPUTATION

### 4.1 Effect of Mythe Flooding in Severn Trent's Reputation

Severn Trent's relationship with its customers appears to have been reasonably tenuous even prior to the loss of main water supply. Thus when considering whether the Mythe flooding had damaged Severn Trent's reputation, respondents did not feel that Severn Trent Water had such a very good reputation in the first place.

*"I'm trying to think is there a brand I can associate it with? No, not especially. Is there a package of communications I'm used to? No, not especially."*

Stroud

*"[My opinion of Severn Trent] was pretty poor in the first place. It was poor and it remains poor."*

Cheltenham

Respondents mentioned that it had recently been reported that the company had been fined by Ofwat for missing its target to reduce leakages and many remembered the 'whistleblower' incident from the previous year.

*"Severn Trent from a business perspective is probably the worst water company in the country based on their performance. They're the only one in their industry that have missed their targets. They're currently being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office. They haven't got a reputation to lose from a business perspective."*

Upton

There was also the view that Severn Trent could have redeemed itself to some extent had they handled the incident better. Changing information regarding the duration of the loss of supply, what the plans were, if any, and whether or not compensation would be given to customers had shown the company to be disorganised.

*"The other silly thing they did was let their PR man go on the television and say we were going to get £20 on the first day and £10 per day thereafter and then they had to go on and say that they weren't going to do that after all"*

Cheltenham

## 4.2 Customers' Expectations from Severn Trent

Respondents in affected areas do not want compensation. This would result in the dissipation of funds that should be directed towards ensuring continuity of supply.

Offers of support for community projects are perceived as spin on the part of Severn Trent, avoiding the essential need to ensure that such events never happen again.

## Compensation Rejected

Respondents were irritated that Severn Trent had suggested offering compensation initially, only to retract that on the grounds of exceptional circumstances. Despite this, respondents in affected areas were almost unanimous in their rejection of any compensation from Severn Trent.

*“I wouldn’t want to claim compensation. I must admit because I think in the circumstances...I think they did what they could do where I live so I wouldn’t claim compensation.”*

Upton

Others felt that people who had suffered from flooding as well were much more deserving of help.

*“I think most people would be quite happy to forego personal compensation if we could actually see that Severn Trent were giving a sufficient amount of money to get other places back on their feet...I know it’s not Severn Trent’s responsibility.”*

Cheltenham

*“I just don’t see how you can say we need compensation or we need money put into the area when all we’ve done is had it cut off. But when you’ve sat there watching people watching their furniture floating down the river...”*

Stroud

A small number in Upton felt that some compensation was due, particularly for metered customers who had paid to receive ‘dirty water’. They complained that Severn Trent had retracted their offer of compensation.

There was a view that more agencies than Severn Trent were responsible for the disaster and should, perhaps, be called to account.

*“It’s all the councils that are affected, they’re to blame and they, Severn Trent, Environmental, should all work out what the bill is going to be.”*

Cheltenham

Giving any meaningful amount to all those customers who had lost supply would represent a high cost that would, they said, inevitably be passed back to the customer through an increase in their water bill.

*“If you don’t think this is going to increase our water bill, you’re dreaming.”*

Stroud

More importantly, they felt that spreading a sum of money among customers would reduce the amount that should be spent on ensuring a continuous water supply – which was their overriding concern.

*“The money is more powerful if it’s kept together, rather than sharing it out into smaller amounts.”*

Tewkesbury

## Support for Community Projects

Severn Trent has recently offered £3.5m towards community projects. Respondents were not impressed by this offer, questioning both the nature and the relevance of community projects as well as Severn Trent's motives in making the offer.

*"I thought it was a cheap shot. £3.5m didn't do their image any good at all."*

Cheltenham

Community projects were seen as potential recipients of Lottery funding rather than appropriate recipients of donations from water companies. Respondents were suspicious that Severn Trent was attempting to be seen as caring in an attempt to redeem what one respondent described as their "PR nightmare". There is a danger that customers will dismiss as 'spin' any steps such as support for community projects. While there appears currently to be little criticism of Severn Trent – indeed, so far they have attracted praise to large extent – customers overwhelmingly want to see action that directly addresses ensuring a continuous supply of water in the future.

*"If they had said, pro rata, this is what you would have paid whilst you've been without water, that amount of money is going towards upgrading the infrastructure, I don't think anyone would have grumbled. But the fact that they say, 'We'll give £3m to good causes like the National Lottery', for goodness sake, how is that appropriate?"*

Cheltenham

A local scout hut, Gloucester football ground and Cheltenham Leisure Centre were mentioned as potentially deserving community projects that had suffered. However, these had been damaged by the flooding, not as a result of the loss of water supply and respondents did make this distinction, suggesting that the government, local councils and the Environment Agency should share responsibility for the flooding.

More than anything, respondents wanted to see funds being directed to ensuring that events such as those they had experienced never happen again. This would entail ensuring the security of Mythe, providing fall back systems and assessing other 'vulnerable' sites.

*"I think the government should put money into community projects and Severn Trent should put it into their basic structure."*

Cheltenham

*"We need another fall-back then for the other areas."*

Upton

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

- Respondents acknowledged Severn Trent's hard work in providing temporary water supplies and restoring their mains water supply. They felt that, for the most part and under difficult and extremely unusual conditions, Severn Trent had done a good job
- Despite this, they felt strongly that the situation should not have happened and, more importantly, that it should never happen again – not just in the affected area but anywhere
- Respondents want to see action regarding Mythe, not just as a reaction to recent flood levels but rather based on the belief that in the future with the predicted increases in extreme weather, flood levels are likely to be significantly higher
- Respondents saw no evidence that Severn Trent had a contingency plan for such a disaster and would like evidence that one is in place. For example, although Severn Trent had responded quickly in distributing bottled water, their management of the location and filling of the bowsers was not considered as effective
- Severn Trent's communication throughout this time was considered to be patchy and inconsistent; which was the area most criticised by respondents in terms of their response to the situation. For example, information regarding the location of bowsers was considered poor; respondents with babies were initially unaware that they needed special bottled water for babies and of the location where they could get this; not everyone received the letter regarding the restoration of mains water supply; customers found it difficult to get through to Severn Trent and, when they did, responses from Severn Trent call centre staff lacked confidence and did not reassure. There was also criticism for Severn Trent's low profile in media communications
- In addition, channels of communication were also questioned. Local radio and Sky Television were mentioned as having been the best sources of information, along with the local 'grapevine'. Media reporting was felt to have focused more on flood victims perhaps at the expense of those without water supply. There could be a place for lobbying for a clearly defined communications process in the case of a declared disaster (as this was) involving national as well as local media, with clear bulletins and information being given at specified time slots
- Severn Trent now has the opportunity to engage with its customers. The company has probably never had such a high profile among its customers and CCWater should ensure that the potential for dialogue is not wasted. There has been a subtle shift in the relationship and customers both want to speak to and listen to Severn Trent
- Vulnerable people appear to have been provided for. The Red Cross and other volunteer groups had helped distribute bottled water and people had 'looked out for'

their more vulnerable neighbours. However, under these exceptional circumstances, 'vulnerable' took on a new meaning. Now, as well as the elderly or chronically sick, it included babies who could not drink the standard bottled water and anyone else who had no access to transport or was not strong enough to carry water

- For respondents in affected areas the experience was regarded as a “wake-up call” as to how precious water is and there was a very strong sense of valuing water more, with many respondents saying they had implemented, or would now implement, water saving measures. It is not possible to say how long term this attitude will be. However, some also said that Severn Trent should see this as an opportunity to emphasise to its customers the importance of water saving
- The majority of respondents in the affected areas did not want compensation as it was felt that this would result in the dissipation of funds that should be directed towards ensuring continuity of supply for the future. Respondents in unaffected areas thought that a refund for supplies not received rather than compensation might be more appropriate, as a goodwill gesture. However, this was half-hearted, and the overwhelming view among all respondents was that money would be better spent on ensuring that such an incident never happens again
- Response to Severn Trent’s offer of £3.5m for community projects met with a mixed reception. Many were cynical as to the company’s real intention and the real value of the offer. A small number felt that some community resources such as Gloucester football ground should be helped by Severn Trent or that the money should go to vulnerable people who had also been flooded. However, all agreed that £3.5m was not a large sum of money.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The key message for CCWater to take back to Severn Trent is that they must learn from the mistakes they made in not protecting Mythe sufficiently and in the quality of their subsequent response to the flooding of Mythe.

There were a number of notable areas where CCWater could direct their actions, most particularly they could:

- work to ensure that areas of responsibility are clearly defined and communications improved between the several agencies responsible for dealing with the flooding and the resulting loss of water supply eg local councils, national government, the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water
- lobby for a clearly defined communications process in the case of a declared disaster (as this was) involving national as well as local media, with clear bulletins and information being given at specified time slots
- seek assurance that Severn Trent (and other water companies) have reviewed their sites, assessed their vulnerability to extreme weather and taken any necessary action

- encourage Severn Trent to demonstrate to customers that they are making the necessary improvements to their infrastructure to ensure continuity of supply in the future
- encourage Severn Trent to demonstrate to customers that they have a disaster recovery plan in place
- encourage Severn Trent to build on, and improve, the dialogue they currently have with their customers through their unprecedented relationship with their customers in recent weeks.

# APPENDIX A

Topic Guide (Affected Areas)

**Moderator:** .....

**Group:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Time:** .....

**Venue:** .....

Good evening... My name is ... and I work for Accent, an independent market research company. We are conducting research for the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) who represent the water customers in England and Wales. The research is looking at customers' experiences during the recent flooding and their views on Severn Trent Water's response and management of the loss of water supplies during the recent flooding. Thank you very much for agreeing to help us with this research and for being here this evening.

The research is being conducted in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society (MRS) and also with the Data Protection Act, with whom Accent is registered. This means that everything you say here this evening is confidential and will not be attributed to you personally.

You will have seen the recording equipment behind me, which provides a video link to another room where you will be observed by representatives of CCWater throughout this discussion. Please don't let that stop you expressing your views frankly. The discussion is also being video and tape-recorded. This is standard market research procedure and is to ensure accuracy – so I do not have to try to remember what you have said – and for analysis purposes only. The recordings will not be passed to any third party not associated with the research project, and I assure you that none of your comments will be attributed to you by name.

The discussion will last around 90 minutes.

Can I stress that we are looking for your views. There are no right or wrong answers. I hope you will all contribute to the discussion.

**Participants introduce themselves**

**5 mins**

- Name
- Age
- Household composition
- Where do you live
- Who is responsible for paying their water bill?
- Occupation
- Is anyone responsible for paying a business water bill in the area?

**Access to information/communication****15mins (20)**

- Did Severn Trent let you know **in advance** that your water supply might be cut off?
  - how did they let you know? Was that the best method of getting that information to you? If not, how would you have liked to have been contacted?
  - how much notice did Severn Trent give you? Was that enough? Why/why not?
  - and did they say how long the interruption to supply was expected to last? **Probe**
- How useful was the **information** Severn Trent gave you?
  - were you given all the information you felt you needed?
  - was there anything else you wanted to know at the time? If so, were you able to get that information or advice? How/where from?
  - was there anything that you later found you needed to know, that you would have liked to have been told earlier?
  - what about the advice given by Severn Trent – was that helpful? Timely? **Probe**
- Was the information and advice you were given **easy to understand**? **Probe**
- Were you given **updates** to that information and advice often enough? **Probe**
  - how were you given those updates? Was that the best method of communicating with you? If not, how would you have liked to be contacted?
- If you contacted Severn Trent, did they answer you:
  - promptly?
  - clearly?
  - accurately?
- How quickly did they respond? How quickly did they take action to sort out any queries/problem?
- Was it clear what the **role** of Severn Trent was, what their responsibilities were? **Probe**
- And was it clear whom you should contact for different issues?
- Were you made aware of any special arrangements for **vulnerable** or elderly customers? **Probe**

**Provision of temporary supplies****20 mins (40)**

- How quickly were temporary supplies provided initially? **Probe**
- Were you told where you could get temporary water supplies? **Probe**
- Were bowsers and bottled water outlets in the most convenient locations for you? **Probe**
- Were there adequate temporary supplies? Were bowsers kept topped up? **Probe**
- Did anyone contact Severn Trent about temporary supplies? How did they respond? **Probe**
- Was any action necessary on the part of Severn Trent? How quickly did they take action? How satisfied were you with their response?

- Were you told that the temporary water supply was not for drinking but should be boiled water purposes/do not drink etc? **Probe**
- Were you kept informed about when your water supply was likely to be back on line?
  - how were you informed? Was this the best means?
- And when the water came back online, were you given any information about the quality of the water, eg whether you could wash with it, drink it, whether it needed boiling etc?
  - how were you given that information? Was this the best means? Was the information easy to understand?

<b>Impact on customers</b>	<b>25 mins (65)</b>
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- How did you feel about not having access to water in your own homes? **Probe**
- Were you affected just in your home, or was your workplace also affected?
- How did this affect your day to day lives? Were you able to carry on going to work, school etc?
- What was the personal impact on you? What inconvenience did you suffer? **Probe**
- Did you need to move out of your homes or out of the area?
- What do you see as the **strengths** of Severn Trent? Was there anything you think that Severn Trent did particularly well in their handling of the situation?
- And what do you see as the **failings** of Severn Trent in their response to the events? Was there anything that Severn Trent didn't do as well as you would have wanted? Or anything they didn't do at all that you think they should do in the future if a similar event occurred? What lessons do you think they should learn?
- Have your experiences changed your attitude to water? Do you value water more now than you used to? **Probe**
- Is there anything you would do differently in the future? (For example, would you have an emergency plan at home, keep bottled water in the house?) **Probe**

<b>What do customers want?</b>	<b>20 mins (85)</b>
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- Have recent events changed your attitudes towards Severn Trent? Why/why not? In what way?
- What do you think about Severn Trent's reputation? Has it been affected by recent events? Has anything enhanced it? Has anything damaged it? **Probe**
- **If think its reputation has suffered:** what can Severn Trent do to restore its reputation and demonstrate its commitment to:
  - customers?
  - businesses?
  - the community?

- Supposing Severn Trent had a pot of money to spend in response to the flooding, where would you want to see this go?
  - compensation for customers affected?
  - to cover community schemes and projects? (**probe** what schemes or projects)
  - to protect the area from future flooding?
  - something else?
- **Pot of money showcard:** would you want to split the money across more than one area? How?
- **If compensation:** how much compensation would you want? How much do you think would be fair?
- Explore relationship between any desired compensation and size of bill: what is your annual water bill? [the average bill in that area is about £300 per year or £25 per month. If respondents suggest high amounts of compensation we'd like to find out why when the amount lost in terms of days was probably only £15 or less]
- If it meant that water bills would rise in the future as a result of the company incurring greater risk, would you still want compensation now? **Probe**
- Severn Trent has recently offered £3.5m community projects. What do you think about that? Is it appropriate? Is it enough/not enough? **Probe**

<b>Wrap</b>	<b>5 mins (90)</b>
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As I said at the beginning, CCWater provide a voice for water customers in England and Wales. They have offices throughout both countries, and keep in close contact with companies that provide the services as well as the consumer themselves.

What one thing would you like CCWater to take up on your behalf with Severn Trent?

[CCWater may provide leaflets. Please tell respondents that they can go to CCWater's website ([www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk)) to find out more information or leave comments. They can also write to CCWater (Midlands) at:

1st floor, Victoria Square House  
 Victoria Square  
 Birmingham  
 B2 4AJ

## APPENDIX B

Topic Guide (Unaffected Area)

Moderator: .....

Group: .....

Date: .....

Time: .....

Venue: .....

Good evening... My name is ... and I work for Accent, an independent market research company. We are conducting research for the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) who represent the water customers in England and Wales. The research is looking at customers' views on Severn Trent Water's response to and management of the loss of water supplies during the recent flooding. Thank you very much for agreeing to help us with this research and for being here this evening.

The research is being conducted in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society (MRS) and also with the Data Protection Act, with whom Accent is registered. This means that everything you say here this evening is confidential and will not be attributed to you personally.

You will have seen the recording equipment behind me, which provides a video link to another room where you will be observed by representatives of CCWater throughout this discussion. Please don't let that stop you expressing your views frankly. The discussion is also being video and tape-recorded. This is standard market research procedure and is to ensure accuracy – so I do not have to try to remember what you have said – and for analysis purposes only. The recordings will not be passed to any third party not associated with the research project, and I assure you that none of your comments will be attributed to you by name.

The discussion will last around 90 minutes.

Can I stress that we are looking for your views. There are no right or wrong answers. I hope you will all contribute to the discussion.

**Participants introduce themselves**

**5 mins**

- Name
- Age
- Household composition
- Where do you live
- Who is responsible for paying their water bill?
- Occupation
- Is anyone responsible for paying a business water bill in the area?

**Access to information/communication****15mins (20)**

On 22 July 2007 Severn Trent's Mythe treatment works was submerged by rising flood water and subsequently shut down early the next day, cutting off mains water supply to 140,000 customers in Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester. Customers were without tap water for 10 days, and without drinkable tap water for 17 days.

- Were you aware of the threat to water supply in the affected area? How? Friends/relatives in the area? News? What did you think about it? **Probe**
- Were you aware of Severn Trent's response? **Probe**
- Did you, as Severn Trent customers, want information regarding the situation?
  - did you follow the news on the situation?
  - what did you think of the media coverage of the situation?
  - what did you think of Severn Trent's media presence?
  - did you get all the information you needed?
  - was there anything else you wanted to know, or think you should have been told?
  - do you think updates were given frequently enough?
- How would you want to receive information or advice in a similar situation?
- Did anyone contact Severn Trent for information? did they answer you:
  - promptly?
  - clearly?
  - accurately?
- Was it clear what the **role** of Severn Trent was, what their responsibilities were? **Probe**

**Provision of temporary supplies****20 mins (40)**

- What would you expect Severn Trent to do in response to a situation like this?
- What did you think of Severn Trent's response to the situation?
  - supply of bottled water
  - supply of bowsers
  - work to remedy the situation
- The temporary water supply was not for drinking but had to be boiled water purposes/do not drink etc. What do you think about that? **Probe**
- When the water came back online, it was not initially drinkable but had to be boiled water purposes/do not drink etc. What do you think about that? **Probe**

**Impact on customers****25 mins (65)**

- How aware were you of the impact on customers of not having access to water in their own homes? **Probe**
- How would you feel about not having access to water in your own homes? **Probe**

- What do you think would be the impact on your day to day lives? Would you be able to carry on going to work, school etc? What measures could you take? What did you hear about the impact on customers in the affected area?
- What would be the personal impact on you? What inconvenience would you suffer? **Probe**
- What do you see as the **strengths** of Severn Trent in their response to the events? Was there anything you think that Severn Trent did particularly well in their handling of the situation?
- And what do you see as the **failings** of Severn Trent in their response to the events? Was there anything that Severn Trent didn't do as well as you would have wanted? Or anything they didn't do at all that you think they should do in the future if a similar event occurred?
- What lessons do you think they should learn? **Probe**
- Have recent events changed your attitude to water? Do you value water more now than you used to? What effect might this have on your water usage? **Probe**
- Is there anything you would do differently in the future? (For example, would you have an emergency plan at home, keep bottled water in the house?) **Probe**

<b>What do customers want?</b>	<b>20 mins (85)</b>
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- Have recent events changed your attitudes towards Severn Trent? Why/why not? In what way?
- What do you think about Severn Trent's reputation? Has it been affected by recent events? Has anything enhanced it? Has anything damaged it? **Probe**
- **If think its reputation has suffered:** what can Severn Trent do to restore its reputation and demonstrate its commitment to:
  - customers?
  - businesses?
  - the community?
- Do you think Severn Trent should pay compensation to those customers who were without water supply? How much compensation do you think should be given to affected customers? How much do you think would be fair?
- Supposing Severn Trent had a pot of money to spend in response to the flooding, where would you want to see this go?
  - compensation for customers affected?
  - to cover community schemes and projects? (**Probe** what schemes or projects)
  - to protect the area from future flooding?
  - something else? **Probe**
- **Pot of money showcard:** would you want to split the money across more than one area? How?
- Explore relationship between any desired compensation and size of bill: what is your annual water bill? [the average bill in that area is about £300 per year or £25 per month. If respondents suggest high

amounts of compensation we'd like to find out why when the amount lost in terms of days was probably only £15 or less]

- If it meant that water bills would rise in the future (over and above planned increases and increases as a result of inflation) as a result of the company incurring greater risk, would you still want affected customers to be given compensation? **Probe**
- Severn Trent has recently offered £3.5m community projects. Had you heard about that? What do you think about that? Is it appropriate? Is it enough/not enough? What should it be spent on? **Probe**

## Wrap

5 mins (90)

As I said at the beginning, CCWater provide a voice for water customers in England and Wales. They have offices throughout both countries, and keep in close contact with companies that provide the services as well as the consumer themselves.

What one thing would you like CCWater to take up on behalf of affected customers with Severn Trent? And on behalf of all Severn Trent customers?

[CCWater may provide leaflets. Please tell respondents that they can go to CCWater's website ([www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk)) to find out more information or leave comments. They can also write to CCWater (Midlands) at:

1st floor, Victoria Square House  
Victoria Square  
Birmingham  
B2 4AJ