



**Westminster Sustainable Business Forum -
Inquiry into Water and Housing
Call for Evidence**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) is the statutory consumer organisation representing water and sewerage consumers in England and Wales. We have four regional committees in England and a committee for Wales.
- 1.2 We welcome the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence part of the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum's Inquiry into Water and Housing.

2 Key points

- Increasing pressure on water supplies from growth cannot be met by demand management alone. There is a need for a twin track approach, consisting of demand management as well as the development of new resources. All new developments should be designed and built to high water efficiency standards, particularly in areas designated as being in serious water stress. However, attention should be paid to how these water efficiency standards are achieved in practice, both in terms of what these standards should be and in terms of how to achieve them.
- Making new developments water efficient shouldn't be just about installing water efficient fittings and fixtures. It should also be about engaging with the residents to explain why these measures are being used and providing water efficiency advice, for example with a home visit and tailored communications to encourage them to act on the advice given.
- On the wastewater side, CCWater supports the inclusion of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and/or flood prevention schemes to build in local resilience. The use of these schemes would ensure that sewers are used to transport sewage rather than for surface water drainage, reducing the likelihood of sewer flooding.
- Practical solutions to increase water efficiency can include:
 - Messaging: messages that raise awareness of the 'bigger picture' outlining what the problem is and why it matters.
 - Metering: the use of smart water meters can help to provide better information to water companies and encourage customers to change their behaviour to use water wisely.
 - Technology: can be a means to an end (to increase water efficiency) and has to be targeted carefully as it may not be suitable for all types of customer.
- The top three risks for water customers deriving from water management failures:
 - Lack of reliable and safe water supplies, impacting on people and the economy.
 - Increase in the number of properties flooded or at risk of flooding.
 - Upwards pressure on water bills in response to failures.

3 Water Availability beyond 2050

- 3.1 The evidence presented in Water UK Water Resources Long-Term Planning Framework (2015-2065)¹ shows that water companies in different parts of England and Wales face varying challenges, with the level of risk changing under different scenarios for climate change, population growth and the

¹ <https://www.water.org.uk/policy/environment/water-resources>

level (and pace) of reduction to current water abstractions where evidence shows these are unsustainable.

- 3.2 Increasing pressure on water supplies from growth cannot be met by demand management alone. There is a need for a twin track approach, consisting of demand management as well as the development of new resources. This will require long-term planning to smooth out potential (water) bill impacts for customers and to ensure intergenerational fairness (today's customers will be paying for reliable water supplies for the customers of the future).
- 3.3 As a result, the water sector needs to be planning now for the future if it is to remain 'fit for purpose'.
- 3.4 Our research² indicates that water customers' awareness of pressures/impacts on water resources is low - only one in five adults have seen/heard something in the past year about this. Furthermore, this research indicates that customers are not making the link between their use of water and the water environment. It appears that those who do decide to use less water do so primarily 'to save money', whilst environmental reasons came in third (following 'it is just common sense'). More therefore needs to be done to raise public awareness of the challenges the water sector faces and how these are going to be addressed and how we can all play a part.

4 Water Efficiency in new homes

- 4.1 One of the conclusions of the Water UK Water Resources Long-Term Planning Framework (2015-2065) project is that water efficiency can play an important role in helping to address (some of) the challenges faced by the water industry and other water dependent sectors.
- 4.2 All new developments should be designed and built to high water efficiency standards, particularly in areas designated as being in serious water stress. However, attention should be paid to how these water efficiency standards are achieved in practice, both in terms of what these standards should be and in terms of how to achieve them. We are aware of a number of water companies that are proposing to incentivise water efficient and flood resilient developments through discounted connection charges.
- 4.3 Making new developments water efficient shouldn't be just about installing water efficient fittings and fixtures. It should also be about engaging with the residents to explain why these measures are being used and providing water efficiency advice, for example with a home visit and tailored communications to encourage them to act on the advice given. Without this support it is unlikely that there will be a sustained behavioural change. Anecdotal evidence suggests that residents often change water efficient fittings and fixtures for more traditional, less efficient ones, defeating the purpose of installing them in the first place.
- 4.4 There will be benefits from engaging with all customers about using water wisely, not only with residents of new builds. These are only a small proportion of all housing stock. Our research³ suggests that talking about the 'bigger picture', explaining why it is important to use water wisely, can encourage customers to take action.
- 4.5 On the wastewater side, CCWater supports the inclusion of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and/or flood prevention schemes to build in local resilience. The use of these schemes would ensure that sewers are used to transport sewage rather than for surface water drainage, reducing the likelihood of sewer flooding. Any known capacity issues in the local sewer network should be addressed before planning permission is granted, allowing the development to proceed.

² BMG Research (2016) Using Water Wisely and Attitudes to Tap Water. Research on behalf of CCWater. <http://www.ccwater.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Consumer-Attitudes-to-Tap-Water-and-Using-Water-Wisely-August-2016.pdf>

³ Community Research (2017) Saving Water: helping customers see the big picture. Research on behalf of CCWater. <https://www.ccwater.org.uk/research/saving-water-helping-customers-see-the-bigger-picture/>

- 4.6 Drainage networks also require schemes that need long-term planning, as well as clear ownership and maintenance responsibilities. Until these issues are dealt with, it will be difficult to increase take-up, and as a result, realise their full potential benefit.
- 4.7 Finally, in order to achieve flood resilience, sewerage companies and other stakeholders with drainage responsibilities will need to work together and with planners. We would like to encourage partnership working in this area with all parties contributing towards achieving a common goal. Where costs fall to sewerage companies these should be planned so that bill impacts are managed appropriately.

5 Practical solutions to improve Water Efficiency

- 5.1 Our research⁴ suggests that people have an expectation that water companies (and government) will do what is necessary to 'solve' the issue of future water shortages for them. In general, customers also accept the need to have their behaviour 'nudged', for example with water meters. But, customers felt it was important that water companies explained why this was required and were transparent and open about their investments and progress made.

Messaging

- 5.2 Messages that raise awareness of the 'bigger picture' outlining what the problem is and why it matters may help to get customers engaged and to act on relevant messaging to use water wisely⁵. This process can help people understand the problem and its consequences, as well as why they are being asked to think about and act on their water use.
- 5.3 These 'big picture' messages should be presented in an *engaging, coherent and structured way* to enable customers to 'join the dots' and understand the relationship between population growth extreme weather and the potential availability of water supplies by the year 2050. These joined-up messages can help to make the situation more real to people, in terms of scale and immediacy.
- 5.4 The traditional 'top-tips' style messages (clear instructions of quick and easy things that can help to use water wisely) can be used once customers are engaged with the 'bigger picture'. There is also scope for 'factual nuggets' of information tailored for metered and unmetered customers. This information can show, for example, how much money can be saved by using less water or is used by different activities. Nonetheless, CCWater research⁶ suggests that messages around the scope for saving money as a result of using less water need to be realistic and achievable. We found customers soon gave up their water saving efforts if the financial savings they were 'promised' didn't materialise.
- 5.5 Other types of messages include 'pro-environmental' messages, showing the link between behaviour and the impact on the environment, as well as messages that inspire customers to think (to some degree) about future generations.
- 5.6 These messages could be tailored further to 'fit' certain types of customers classified in terms of water use, attitudes, behaviour and socio-economic characteristics - to name a few attributes.

⁴ Community Research (2017) Saving Water: helping customers see the big picture. Research on behalf of CCWater. <https://www.cewater.org.uk/research/saving-water-helping-customers-see-the-bigger-picture/>

⁵ Community Research (2017) Saving Water: helping customers see the big picture. Research on behalf of CCWater. <https://www.cewater.org.uk/research/saving-water-helping-customers-see-the-bigger-picture/>

⁶ Research Works (2016) Beneath the Surface: Customers' Experiences of Universal Metering. A report on behalf of CCWater and Southern Water. November <http://www.cewater.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Customers-Experiences-of-Universal-Metering.pdf>

CCWater research⁷ indicates that customers can be divided into (qualitative) ‘typographies’ or groups (based on behaviour and/or attitudinal variables as well as demographic characteristics) that determine people’s willingness and ability to engage with issues related to water and the potential to change their actions to use water more wisely.

- 5.7 The research suggests there are basically four types of customers: willing and unable, unwilling but able, willing but unable and unwilling and unable. These can also be linked to variables such as personality, lifestyle, values, attitudes and life stage. . Additional research done by the industry (UKWIR⁸) confirms the existence of different types of customers, in relation to their attitudes to water and the potential to modify their behaviours. As a result, targeted messages for different types/segments of customers are required.

Metering

- 5.8 The use of smart water meters can help to provide better information for the water company and, ultimately for customers/households. This additional information can be beneficial for all:
- Water companies can get better information about how much water is being used (and when) as well as providing additional tools to improve leak detestation and repair.
 - Smart metering linked to messaging on using water wisely can help customers to change their behaviour and reduce their water use. According to the ‘Discover Water Portal’⁹, on average, metered customers use 127 litres per person per day, whilst un-metered customers use 160 litres per person per day.
- 5.9 In 2015-16, just over half (53%¹⁰) of household customers had a water meter installed. We expect that gradually, the percentage of metered housing stock will increase. This will happen either as a result of companies’ metering strategies or because customers choose to have a meter installed.
- 5.10 Universal water metering is not a ‘silver bullet’ to address water scarcity. It does not overcome the need to invest in further water resources in seriously water stressed areas. Targeted metering can, however, be part of a wider strategy that considers aspects such as: active leakage control, water re-use, grey water recycling and water resource development. Together, these will be required to address the pressure on available water resources from climate change, population growth and unsustainable abstractions. Water UK highlights this point in its recent report.

Technology

- 5.11 The use of ‘smart’ technology, can be means to an end (increase water efficiency) and has to be targeted carefully as it may not be suitable for all types of customers. Innovative products need to be accessible, not only from an economic point of view, but also in terms of being easy to understand and operate. The life cycle of the gadget also needs to be considered, to avoid creating additional waste or to prevent it from becoming obsolete after a short period of time. Customers need to understand what the gadget/app does and how it can encourage them to use less water.
- 5.12 More needs to be done to understand how customers will accept and use technology in their everyday lives to help them use water wisely and whether the water savings achieved would justify the associated costs.

⁷ Opinion Leader (2006) Using Water Wisely - a deliberative consultation commissioned by CCWater. October <http://www.ccwater.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Using-Water-Wisely-deliberative-research-into-water-use-and-water-conservation-attitudes-CCWater-October-2006..pdf>

⁸ UKWIR (2014) Understanding Customer Behaviour for Water Demand Forecasting. UKWIR Reference: 14/WR/01/14

⁹ <https://discoverwater.co.uk/amount-we-use>

¹⁰ CCWater (2016) Delving into water 2016: Performance of the water companies in England and Wales 2011-12 to 2015-16. November <http://www.ccwater.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Delving-into-water-2016.pdf>

Retrofits

- 5.13 Combining water audits and retrofits is a beneficial approach: customers get the water efficient products they need or that are appropriate/of use to their circumstances, these are fitted during the home visit, and the customer also receives tailored advice and support on how to use water (and energy) wisely.
- 5.14 Possibly the most effective way to achieve the desired outcomes when carrying out water efficiency retrofits is through partnership working, especially in social housing. These partnerships could be formed by water companies, local authorities and other stakeholders. It is important that the lessons learned from these partnerships are used to expand the evidence base to ensure the likelihood of success of similar projects undertaken by others.
- 5.15 In terms of retrofits another aspect that should be addressed is leaking toilets, given the savings that can be achieved by fixing these. Thames Water's 'leaky loo'¹¹ programme indicates that a single leaking toilet 'can waste up to 400 litres of water per day' and cost around £300 a year for a metered customer.

6 Key risks (3) for water customers from water management failures

- 6.1 The top-three key risks for water customers (and the economy) deriving from water management failures:
- Lack of reliable and safe water supplies. This would have a huge negative impact on people, businesses and the wider economy.
 - Increase in the number of properties flooded and at risk of flooding; this would have a significant impact on those affected.
 - Upwards pressure on water bills, due to responding to failures after the event as opposed to preparing for the future in a planned manner.

We note that these risks could have a disproportionately high impact on vulnerable customers.

7 Enquiries

Enquiries about this submission should be addressed to:

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¹¹ <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/Be-water-smart/You-can-be-water-smart/Leaky-loos>