



# Wessex Water Customer and Stakeholder Consultation

Final Report

April 2023



Introduction and methodology

Overall response to plans

Evaluation of Individual Outcome Areas

Executive summary

**Your say  
Your future**



**TELL US WHAT **YOU** THINK  
AT AN EVENT NEAR YOU.**

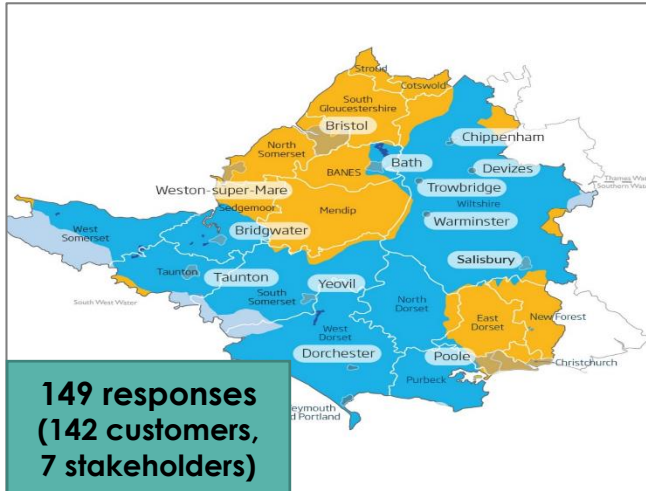
**21 February to 10 March 2023**

- ✓ Hear about our investment plans.
- ✓ Meet our team and ask questions.
- ✓ Have your say on future improvements.



- **Research objectives:** Obtain feedback on the 2030 and 2050 business plans from customers, stakeholders and staff
- **Research approach:** Respondents received information about the plans through face to face and online events, in articles in print and online, as well as through a staff email. Their opinions were gathered through a web survey, depth interviews or in conversation.

## Face to face events



- Held at 10 locations across the region **Feb-March** with boards to display Wessex Water's plan.
- Customers were guided through the information and then asked to provide feedback verbally and through a survey.
- Wessex staff and research executives captured insight and vox pops through conversations with attendees.

## Print, online and letter



- An article about the plan was published in the Wessex Water magazine with a link to more information the website. People could access the survey through a link on the page and were incentivised with a £250 prize draw.
- Staff were also invited to complete the survey by email.

## Stakeholder engagement



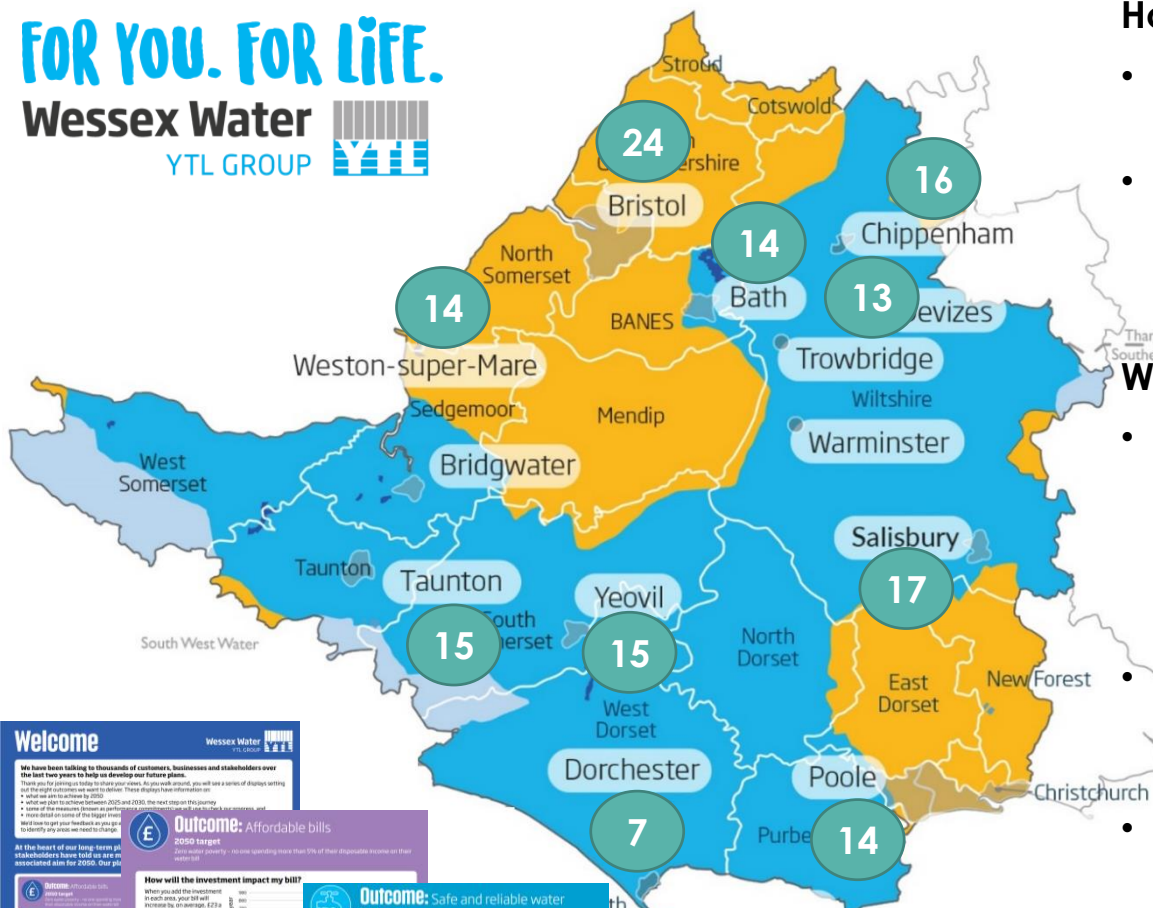
- Online stakeholder event in early Feb – setting out plans and seeking feedback, with attendees invited to complete an online survey afterwards.
- In order to obtain deeper insight, 6 online depths were then completed with stakeholders from councils, environmental groups, education facilities and consumer organisations.





# Face to face consultation events were the backbone of the consultation

The face to face consultation events achieved good reach, covering multiple locations in the Wessex area and achieving high attendance and a good mix of demographics across the sample.



### How many?

- **149** people completed the survey having attended one of the events which took place in 10 locations between 21<sup>st</sup> February - 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023.
- An estimated further **75 people** attended but did not complete the survey, often because they had spoken at length with Wessex staff and felt they didn't have more to say, or because they attended with another person who completed the survey.

### Who?

- There was a **good spread of demographics** across the sample. This included:
  - A range of ages
  - People whose first language was not English
  - Those experiencing financial difficulties
- The profile was somewhat **location-dependent**; as a university city, Bristol had a lot of younger attendees for its daytime event, whereas in Yeovil those who were on the streets tended to be older or unemployed.
- Most attendees were customers, but small numbers of stakeholders and staff also attended.
- Attendees were often politically engaged and there was attendance from environmental organisations such as XR in multiple locations.

NB: the consultation participants are not a representative sample of the general public nor the customer base. Caution needed when interpreting the responses.



## Events allowed a range of people to learn and share their views

- **Engaged customers:** People who saw events organised and came to find out more, often examining plans in detail
- **Issue raisers:** Those who wanted to speak at length about a particular issue, often sewerage, river health or affordable bills
- **Drive-bys:** Those who read the plans, often quickly, and left before completing the survey or speaking to anyone
- **Street recruits:** People who stumbled upon events or were recruited on the street who ended up staying a while
- **Associates:** Small numbers of staff, stakeholders and other interested parties

## Attendees felt positive about being consulted

- People felt it is important for Wessex to share their plans and invite people to have their say.
- Many were impressed that senior Wessex staff were present, including directors - it felt like they were talking with key decision makers.
- Many customers demonstrated high engagement by staying for a good amount of time examining information.
- The majority also directly engaged with Wessex staff, often having extended conversations which kept the team busy throughout.

## Sessions were effective at informing attendees

- Many face to face attendees commented that the boards looked attractive and were well laid out.
- Respondents felt the information was comprehensive and gave a good overview of the range of activities carried out by Wessex and how they interlink.
- In particular, the sessions left attendees with the impression that Wessex Water care about their work and are committed to solving the issues covered.
- For some there was too much information for them to digest, but they were satisfied by briefer explanations by staff.

*"It was interesting, it was helpful and in particular it shows good customer relations...it's the fact that you're here and that people, all of the staff are here from Wessex Water and helpfully taking us through the whole process."*

Customer, Salisbury

*"After a conversation with the Wessex rep it seems they really care."*

Customer, Yeovil

*"I found it quite easy to read, so it all makes sense. It's very clear and nicely presented."*

Customer, Bath







# Overall response to plans



BLUE MARBLE



## 2050 Outcome Areas

## 2030 Goals

 **Outcome:** Affordable bills  
**2050 target**  
 Zero water poverty – no one spending more than 5% of their disposable income on their water bill

 **Outcome:** Safe and reliable water  
**2050 target**  
 • 100% compliance with drinking water standards, always  
 • Zero supply interruptions of longer than 3 hours.

 **Outcome:** An effective sewerage system  
**2050 target**  
 Halve the impact of sewer flooding on our customers

 **Outcome:** Great customer experience  
**2050 target**  
 Be a top 10 customer service provider in the UK

 **Outcome:** Sustainable abstraction  
**2050 target**  
 Never harm the health of the water environment through our abstraction – 100% compliance with our abstraction licences

 **Outcome:** Great river and coastal water quality  
**2050 target**  
 • To restore the quality of our rivers and coastal waters  
 • Zero pollution incidents

 **Outcome:** Net zero carbon  
**2050 target**  
 Be a net zero carbon business by 2040

 **Outcome:** Biodiversity  
**2050 target**  
 Double our contribution to the region's biodiversity

 **Outcome:** Affordable bills  
 • Increase the number of household that we support with their bills to over 100,000 automatically applying discounts where we can  
 • Continue to fund our debt advice partners and a range of local community projects to help those in need  
 • Help customers, particularly those on water meters, to save water and energy

 **Outcome:** Safe and reliable water  
 • Reduce supply interruptions over 3 hours to an average of 5 mins per property from 6 mins currently  
 • Improve 12 of our water treatment centres to ensure the long-term supply of safe drinking water  
 • Replace 6,000 lead pipes and provide a customer grant scheme to replace lead pipes inside customers' homes

 **Outcome:** An effective sewerage system  
 Reduce sewer flooding and storm overflow discharges by:  
 • Investing in sustainable measures to reduce the amount of rainwater entering sewers  
 • Working with customers to reduce sewer blockages  
 • Increasing sewer surveys to identify pipes that need to be repaired or cleaned  
 • Building storage tanks where appropriate to reduce discharges of storm overflows

 **Outcome:** Great customer experience  
 Be the top UK water and sewerage company and improve our customer service by:  
 • Using technology to fix problems quicker  
 • Giving customers more options to contact us and improving our online self-service options  
 • Improving communications with customers during an event  
 • Extending our Priority Services scheme, providing greater support to those customers with particular needs

 **Outcome:** Sustainable abstraction  
 • 100% compliance with our abstraction licences  
 • Reduce leakage by 5 million litres per day  
 • Help customers, schools and businesses by carrying out 10,000 free visits to check water use, fix leaks and fit water efficiency devices  
 • Install 430,000 smart meters to identify leaks and help reduce water use using digital apps

 **Outcome:** Great river and coastal water quality  
 • Stop 1,500 tonnes of phosphorus and nitrogen entering rivers and the sea at our sites and by working in partnership with farmers  
 • Invest in smart sewers to alert us to issues quickly and prevent pollutions  
 • Reduce the number of pollutions to no more than 50 per year

 **Outcome:** Net zero carbon  
 • Be a net zero carbon business across our operations  
 • Install 100 charging points to keep electric vehicles running

 **Outcome:** Biodiversity  
 Improve the biodiversity of 716 hectares of land (equivalent to 1,000 football pitches)

## Overall reaction to plan – customers and staff

Scores varied by customer type, with staff staying loyal to their employers and customers not deeming themselves sufficiently knowledgeable to give an opinion.



73%

**Overall  
satisfaction**

83%

**Focusses on  
right things**

51%

**Ambitious**

47%

**Achieved by  
2030**

### Customers tended to deliver a superficial assessment of goals due to lack of specialist knowledge

- Plan appears reasonable to layperson - comprehensive, clearly laid out and with achievable outcomes, resulting in high score for focusing on right things.
- Many customers do not feel qualified to judge if goals are ambitious or achievable, leading to a higher proportion of 'neutral' scores – they feel Wessex, as experts, must deliver what is best.
- Customers awarding lower scores tended to have deep specialist knowledge and were able to make an informed assessment of the goals. Most wanted more ambitious plans with shorter timescales.

*"I don't feel qualified to make any suggestion."*

Customer, Dorchester

*"I have no comments on this, I trust in my water provider to make the best decision for their customers."*

Customer, Chippenham



*! small  
sample !*

86%

**Overall  
satisfaction**

86%

**Focusses on  
right things**

79%

**Ambitious**

57%

**Achieved by  
2030**

### Wessex staff appeared positive about their work and employer

- Staff gave high scores for the focus and ambition of goals – demonstrating their investment in a plan which they will likely be involved in developing or delivering in some capacity.
- They showed slightly lower certainty that the plans will be achieved on time, perhaps due to a better understanding of the context to the plan, what the work will entail and the challenges that lie ahead.

*"Current concerns will vary according to the political and economic climate, this plan will need to be reflective and adaptive according to change".*

Staff

*Figures are based on a small sample and insights should be considered directional only*



## Overall reaction to plan - stakeholders

With their in-depth specialist knowledge and role representing the interests of customers, local communities or the environment, stakeholders tended to be more critical of the plan.



42%

**Overall  
satisfaction**

86%

**Focusses on  
right things**

29%

**Ambitious**

29%

**Achieved by  
2030**

### Stakeholders tended to be more cynical and critical of the plan

- Stakeholders agreed with the focus of the plan, as reflected in the high score for this area, but considered that the outcome areas covered common ground for the whole sector and they would not have expected any not to be featured.
- However, many were frustrated by the lack of detail as it did not allow for a proper assessment of the plan, and some would like to see a full comparison of companies.
- Some went further by suggesting that the presentation of the information had the feel of a 'manifesto' designed to dupe customers. In particular, they felt that the numbers and investment figures looked impressive but were meaningless without the relevant context – but that this would not be realized by the average customer who does not have industry knowledge.
- Given the role of many stakeholders is to hold companies to account it is no surprise that there was greater diversity in the scores for the subsequent questions around ambition and likelihood to achieve. Many were negative about a plan they considered to be 'green fluff' rather than a genuine attempt to make improvements. Others questioned whether it would be possible to achieve the goals by 2030 given the scale of the issues and with the amount of money promised.

*"The general public have no idea what you can achieve with a particular sum [of money.]"*

Stakeholder

*"The problem is they are very generic - they are the sort of thing no reasonable person can object to. The devil is in the detail."*

Stakeholder

*"All those outcomes are important so getting the public to 'rank' them is disingenuous in my opinion."*

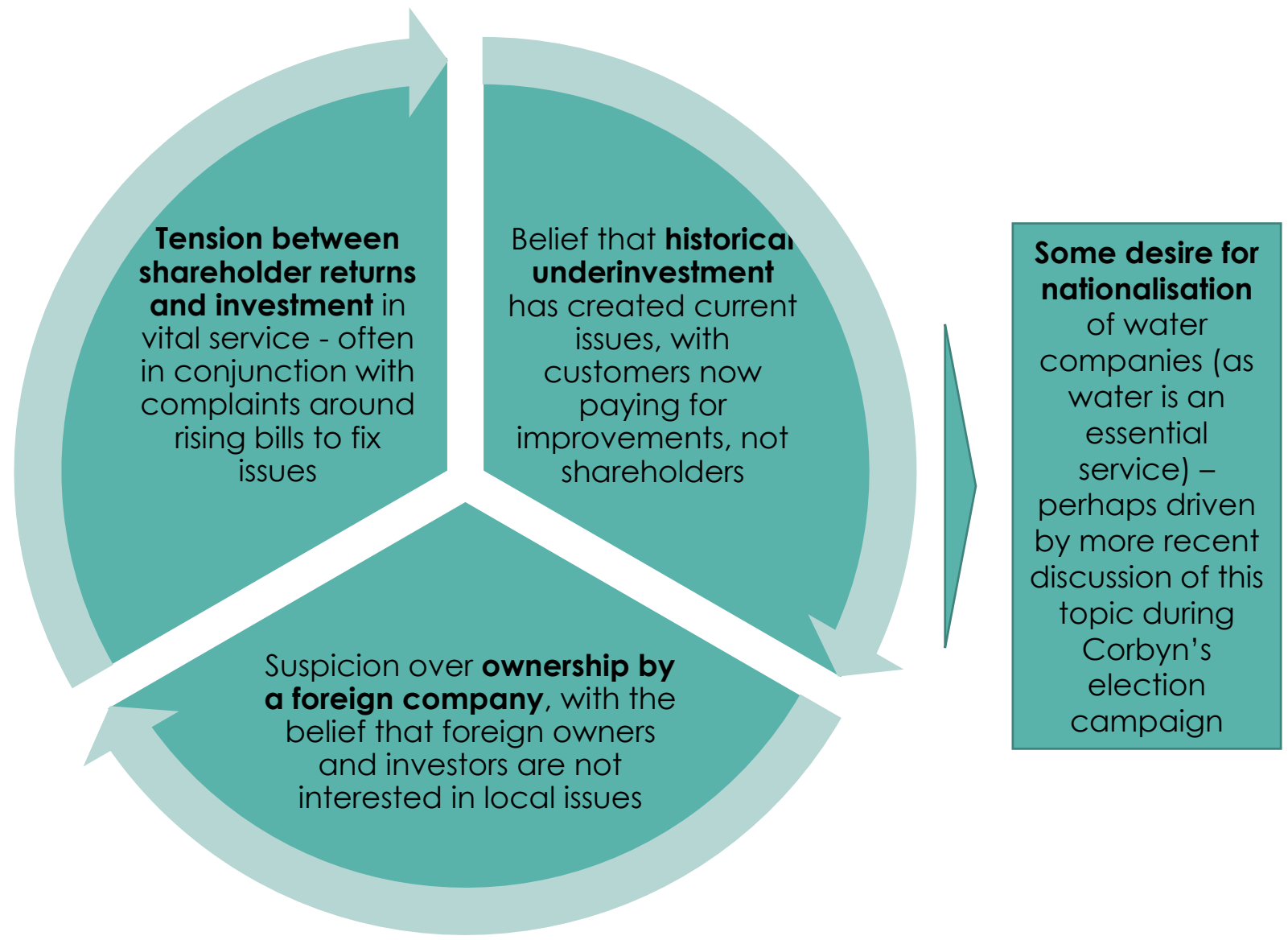
Stakeholder

*"Putting my cynical hat on, this is just about shareholder payouts masked by "green fluff".*

Stakeholder



Detailed analysis across the data suggests around 15% of the sample held negative views relating to privatisation, shareholder profits and foreign ownership, which influenced their overall sentiment towards the plan



"Since we as customers have had a very limited input into the decisions made by the big companies like Wessex Water, I don't see why we should be paying for those problems. The companies have been making the policy problems, so the customers shouldn't have to be paying for the mistakes they've made".  
Customer, Weston

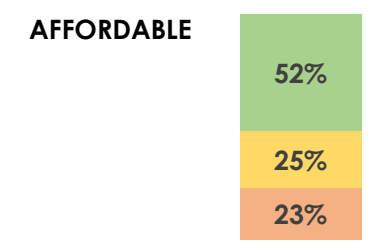
"The systems are creaky, falling to pieces, this utility hasn't played its part in looking after the environment at all since they bought it."  
Customer, Bristol

"I always read the pamphlet which accompanies my bills and feel reassured that Wessex water is trying to do the right thing. My only doubt revolves around the difficulties of providing these services and satisfying your shareholders, some of whom may well be foreign nationals and therefore less interested in your good services."  
Customer, Chippenham

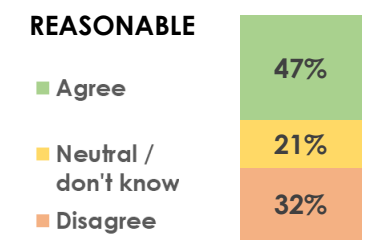
"I also would like to see eventually when its economically possible to see water nationalized."  
Customer, Dorchester

# Affordability was a highly emotive topic that elicited strong views across the sample

Whilst most believed that they could afford the price increase, conversation was overshadowed by a larger debate around whether customers should have to pay for improvements.



- Projected price increases shocked many – but this was tempered by the realisation that inflation is a key driver.
- Just over half believed they could afford the increases, but uncertainty during a period of rapid increases to the cost of living was reflected in the fact that a quarter neither agreed or disagreed that they could afford it - or said that they did not know if they could.
- Many respondents stressed that whilst they themselves could afford higher bills, they were concerned about others' capability to absorb the increases.



- Almost half thought the price increases reasonable as investment is needed to maintain an essential service.
- However, a third did not agree that the increases are reasonable – in particular, stakeholders and those with greater knowledge of the water industry. Around 15% of the sample were negative about price rises for customers, suggesting that company profits should fund works rather than being paid to shareholders.
- A few saw the plans as lacking in transparency as they did not include profit projections.

*"Since we as customers have had a very limited input into the decisions made by the big companies like Wessex Water, I don't see why we should be paying for those problems. The companies have been making the policy problems, so the customers shouldn't have to be paying for the mistakes they've made."*

Customer, Weston Super Mare

*"It's all about how much it will cost me, but nothing about YTL sharing the pain through lower dividends. It is a business, make it clear how much YTL is chipping in."*

Customer, Bath

*"I can afford the bill increase but worry that a lot of people won't be able to."*

Customer, Weston Super Mare

*"You can't just keep all the money and increase bills to pay for infrastructure projects."*

Customer, Bournemouth

*"What's not mentioned on plans is how much the company dividend will be reduced and how much the ROI from YTL leveraging WW's £8bn asset portfolio will be reduced so that the "money men" feel the same financial pain as the customer base."*

Customer, Chippenham

*"You say we're going to have to pay a 40% increase, and again you're not telling us how much profit you're making."*

Customer, Bath

*"Bills are going to go up in the next 5 years to pay for these investments... are shareholders going to reduce the amount they get?"*

Customer, Taunton

Q10: How strongly do you agree that you will be able to afford the increases/the increases are reasonable? Base size: 178 (all responses received)



## Timescales involved are too long

Significant numbers of people expressed that the timescales are very long and they would like to see goals achieved more quickly. Many issues are considered pressing and require more urgent action – particularly renewing sewerage infrastructure and addressing the climate emergency. There was some anger from those who believe Wessex should have done more in previous years, and frustration that shorter timescales may not be feasible due to historic underinvestment.

*"Given you have been in charge as a Water Company for over 30 years and should have been delivering all these targets for that duration then 2050 is an unacceptable timeframe."*

Stakeholder

*"2050 is far too late. Decades of neglect for such an essential necessity of life needs an emergency response. It's difficult to trust profit driven organisations to change their priorities."*

Customer, Yeovil

## Plans are unambitious and lack innovation

Some stakeholders and respondents with greater industry expertise suggested that the plans contain the bare minimum required to satisfy regulator targets instead of being driven by a genuine desire to make improvements. This was linked to the need to deliver returns for shareholders rather than adopting more radical solutions which would require greater investment. Respondents suggested a number of innovative approaches across different areas which they would like explored.

*"They are an impressive company, they have a lot of levers they can pull, if they so desire... It just doesn't feel ambitious enough or innovative."*

Stakeholder

*"Don't know enough to really comment on the specifics but feel we need to be more ambitious as there is an [environmental] issue."*

Customer, Taunton

## Need for collaboration

There was recognition across all groups that outcome areas are interlinked, with investment in one area benefitting others. Water is just one part of the bigger environmental picture and Wessex cannot achieve overarching goals alone and there is a desire for them to join forces with other companies to obtain political support. Wessex should also look to convey more clearly in its plans the importance of collaboration between consumers, industry, commerce and agriculture.

*"Most of the outcomes go beyond Wessex Water and need more sector-wide approaches... I would strongly recommend water utilities to join forces and have this discussion with government. The current mechanism of AMP cycles and PRs slows that process down."*

Customer, Chippenham

*"If the government sees that the companies are working together and putting pressure on them to do things, something more will get done in terms of regulation with the polluters. Also, when people see examples like that, the culture of a country changes."*

Customer, Yeovil



# Evaluation of Individual Outcome Areas



BLUE MARBLE

## Number of times outcome areas (2050 and 2030) ranked in top three most important/urgent

Significantly higher scores than other 4 outcome areas



← LEAST PERSONALLY IMPORTANT/URGENT

→ MOST PERSONALLY IMPORTANT/URGENT

- Safe and Reliable water, Effective Sewerage System, Great River and Coastal Water Quality and Affordable Bills consistently voted most important and urgent outcome areas, with scores significantly higher than the other four outcome areas.
- Opinions driven by highest profile and most relatable issues - many mentioned reports of sewage 'dumping' on news or social media; and increases to the cost of living have been highly publicised and affect all.
- By contrast, Sustainable Abstraction and Biodiversity are lower profile and Great Customer Experience is seen as a hygiene issue by many. Although high profile, Net Zero appears to polarise views – with many people questioning its worth as a goal.
- Ranking was consistent across 2050 and 2030 plans, with respondents from all groups struggling to differentiate between the specified timescales.





## Outcome: Safe and reliable water

- Reduce supply interruptions over 3 hours to an average of 5 mins per property from 6 mins currently
- Improve 12 of our water treatment centres to ensure the long-term supply of safe drinking water
- Replace 6,000 lead pipes and provide a customer grant scheme to replace lead pipes inside customers' homes

## Importance and Urgency Rank:

1

15

- Customers frequently expressed the sentiment that providing safe and reliable water was the **cornerstone of services** that should be provided by a water company.
- Water shortages were not high on customers' radars, so **discussions often engaged more with water being safe** (to drink, swim in etc.) rather than the risk of supply interruptions.

### Positives

- Customers were pleased initiatives to ensure safe and reliable water – even if they did not understand the relevance of the goals
- Stakeholders felt that Wessex Water's performance on supply interruptions was impressive

### Negatives

- Customers found it difficult to conceptualise supply interruption stats
- Lacked detail around strategies to secure water supply in the long term
- Minimal discussion around water shortages amongst customers suggests more education may be needed to raise awareness

### Improvements

- Grants to help customers replace lead pipes would support Affordable Bills outcome
- Greater education re responsible use of water
- Solutions around water capture, recycling and reuse (from deluges and in domestic settings)
- Wider conversation of better use of SUDs which could help with water quality, better sewer performance and links to nutrient neutrality
- Clean water bottled to help reduce cap requirement in storm seasons, water to be distributed with priority to those in poverty, then for profit

"I would liked to have seen more explanation of how water supply will be secured to 2050, in the face of climate change projections, without resorting to more abstraction. That would be including more explanation of ecosystem protection."

Customer, Taunton

"Find solutions to support the use of rainwater storage to reduce demand on potable water for uses such as toilet flushing, washing, irrigation."

Stakeholder





## Outcome: An effective sewerage system

Reduce sewer flooding and storm overflow discharges by:

- Investing in sustainable measures to reduce the amount of rainwater entering sewers
- Working with customers to reduce sewer blockages
- Increasing sewer surveys to identify pipes that need to be repaired or cleaned
- Building storage tanks where appropriate to reduce discharges of storm overflows

## Importance and Urgency Rank:

2

16

- Customer concern about the ambition of Wessex targets for effective sewerage reflect media coverage of CSOs – many are unaware of their purpose and think it is possible to eliminate them entirely.
- Some customers had local concerns related to sewage flooding and blockages, and were keen for this to be addressed quickly, particularly as new housing developments continue.
- Several customers showed willingness to engage, asking for advice around blockage prevention and requesting gunkpots.

### Positives

- Customers were pleased to see actions to tackle an issue that they perceive to be important – but had limited specific feedback.
- Nature-based solutions positively received.

*“When people say your water bills are going to go up to try and fix all this stuff - no, sorry, you need to stop giving investors so much blooming money out of profiteering from this, again its absolutely outrageous that all of this hasn't been invested in.” Stakeholder*

*“To see 2050 targets is just so distressing – it's far too late. I don't think ‘working with customers’ is cutting it, it's just not ambitious enough.” Stakeholder*

### Negatives

- Many stakeholders and some customers expressed frustration at the scale of the initiatives:
  - Lacks innovation
  - Not sufficiently ambitious
  - Too slow
- Described in stakeholder sessions as “a slap in the face” given perception that privatised industry caused failure to invest to address issues meaning customers must pay more now

*“I would like to see rewilding included as a goal, especially because of the benefit that this will have on drainage. Restoring woodland could have huge impacts on rainfall capture and avoid the need for continuing investment into storm overflows.” Customer, Bristol*

### Improvements

- Education campaign around blockage prevention e.g. disposal of fats, oils and grease. Focus on educating younger generations.
- Infrastructure innovation schemes to reduce use of CSOS e.g. separating foul water from water supply
- Specific nature-based solutions e.g. reedbed filtration, rewilding for rainwater capture
- Target highest spillers and those in more sensitive areas first
- More emphasis on surface water pressures/surface water system.





## Outcome: Great river and coastal water quality

- Stop 1,500 tonnes of phosphorus and nitrogen entering rivers and the sea at our sites and by working in partnership with farmers
- Invest in smart sewers to alert us to issues quickly and prevent pollutions
- Reduce the number of pollutions to no more than 50 per year

## Importance and Urgency Rank:

3

- Customers felt the health of waterways has decreased in recent years due to 'dumping' of sewage and fertiliser, with noticeable impact on wildlife (e.g. reduced amount of ducks and fish in local rivers) and health risks for swimmers
- This issue is top priority for many stakeholders, requiring urgent action
- Belief that underinvestment and lack of regulation are key causes
- Clean bathing waters important for tourism and therefor revenue

### Positives

- Customers happy to see the issue being addressed
- Smart sewers seen as good value
- Collaboration welcomed by respondents, especially stakeholders

### Negatives

- Water quality targets not ambitious enough
- Initiatives lack innovation – smart sewers not seen as cutting edge
- Goals seen as unambitious and timescales met with dismay by some stakeholders – feel much more urgent action is needed

### Improvements

- Increase collaboration with other organisations to improve water quality, stressing shared benefits or establishing joint targets
- Collaborate with farmers and gov't agencies on nutrient reduction and biodiversity e.g. crackdown on release of slurry into waterways
- Bring forward nutrient neutrality targets
- Enhance filters at sewage treatment sites to enable re-use of phosphates and nitrogen
- Actively inform customers about water quality & provide proof of improvement
- Incentivise customer storm water buffering with free PV & offset WRC grid carbon costs in parallel

"Slightly surprised that smart sewers are considered an 'innovation', would have expected this to have been achieved much sooner- complete no brainer due to relatively small cost it would add to bills." Customer, Bath

"Too slow, too little, too late and a lot it should already be in place." Stakeholder

"I've always swum in the sea and I take my grandchildren to swim in the sea, it's the highlight of my summer...I would be horrified to think that it's not good quality, you don't know by looking at it so you're relying on what you're being told." Customer, Yeovil

"Bring forward all the filters at sewage sites to prevent phosphates and nitrogen entering the waterways and look at how these can be reused to replace farmers having to purchase additional artificial fertiliser." Stakeholder







## Outcome: Affordable bills

- Increase the number of household that we support with their bills to over 100,000 automatically applying discounts where we can
- Continue to fund our debt advice partners and a range of local community projects to help those in need
- Help customers, particularly those on water meters, to save water and energy

## Importance and Urgency Rank:

4

18

- Affordability is highly relatable given recent price increases to many essential products and services, and the extensive media coverage of the cost of living crisis and the impact.
- Many comments demonstrated the social conscience felt by many, with customers, staff and stakeholders all expressing a desire to protect the most financially vulnerable in society, ensuring access to a product which is essential to life.

### Positives

- Some pleased that there is a specific focus on ensuring affordability whilst investing in other essential areas
- Support for low income households positively received, particularly given the current economic climate
- Staff recognise importance of goals to maintaining reputation as a 'customer service business'

### Negatives

- Very negative reaction from many given the perceived issues with private ownership of water companies – targets seem disingenuous
- Many could not see past this broader issue in order to make an assessment of the specific goals
- Question over whether measures are sufficient to offset bill increases

### Improvements

- Greater emphasis on publicising social tariffs
- Explore means-tested bills & zero water rates
- Justify potential price rises in context of s/holder dividends - what safeguards will be used to make proportionate?
- Explore revenue generation initiatives to offset bill increase
  - Biogas at sewage sites as end product of digestate - can be used to make biochar
  - Hydropower at reservoirs and in the pipe network
  - Soil testing service for farmers, allowing optimization of fertilizer

"We have come a long way from being an engineering and construction business to a customer service business and wouldn't want to take a backstep due to affordability." Staff, online survey

"Given the size of the potential bill increases I think you need to review whether your actions on affordable bills are adequate." Stakeholder

"Bills should perhaps be means tested by linking to rateable value or market price- those with greatest assets should pay more to ensure those without are not penalised. Alternatively, anyone on universal credit should pay zero water rates with deficit refunded from central government." Customer, Salisbury

"Revenue generating investments that solve problems rather than problem solving investments that require revenue." Customer, Bristol





## Outcome: Biodiversity

Improve the biodiversity of 716 hectares of land (equivalent to 1,000 football pitches)

Importance and Urgency Rank:

5

- Biodiversity is a topic that **many felt was personally important** to them – although many lacked specific knowledge about possible improvements.
- Improving biodiversity was felt to **benefit the local area** e.g. by creating natural areas around reservoirs that people can enjoy.

### Positives

- Customers were **reassured by the targets** they were given that Wessex Water are 'doing their bit' in terms of protecting biodiversity
- Benefits to an area the size of 1,000 football pitches sounds impressive

### Negatives

- Lack of detail around specific measures taken to improve biodiversity
- Outcome area feels like an afterthought, with minimal content
- Target is vague – what does 'improve' actually mean and how will this be measured?

### Improvements

- Increase focus on commitments, with more initiatives and greater amounts of detail around what they will include and how outcomes will be measured
- Increase focus on nature-based solutions in other outcome areas to support biodiversity goals
- Provide more specific details on current commitments to biodiversity e.g. exact location of improvements and SSSI areas etc.

*"I think the most important outcome areas is the wildlife and their environment. This includes how they are impacted by our influence."* Stakeholder

*"I want the exhibition to show more detailed maps where your areas of improvement will be e.g. exact location of biodiversity improvements and SSSI areas etc. Also exact rivers."* Customer, Dorchester

*"Needs clarity on the area of land and what biodiversity increase, both land and water, they will be aiming for."* Stakeholder





## Outcome: Sustainable abstraction

- 100% compliance with our abstraction licences
- Reduce leakage by 5 million litres per day
- Help customers, schools and businesses by carrying out 10,000 free visits to check water use, fix leaks and fit water efficiency devices
- Install 430,000 smart meters to identify leaks and help reduce water use using digital apps

## Importance and Urgency Rank:

6

20

- Not ranked as very high on the agenda by customers, potentially due to terminology used – it was often necessary to explain ‘abstraction’.
- Leakage was more emotive, but goal not noticed by many customers
- By contrast, leakage was a top concern for many stakeholders, with a strong feeling that the water industry needs to address this. Some felt that there should be no shareholder dividends until it is sorted.

### Positives

- Smart meter installation targets welcomed by many, particularly cost conscious customers and those who had experienced a reduction in bills since having a meter installed
- Good understanding of concepts around reducing abstraction once customers understand terminology

“I’d expect [100% compliance with abstraction licenses] at the very least.” Customer, Bath

### Negatives

- Confusion on what exactly ‘sustainable abstraction’ means; suggestion that simply complying with abstraction licenses does not go far enough
- Low awareness of drought risks amongst customers limits engagement with Outcome Area
- Suspicion around smart meter initiative – perception that they aren’t accurate and lack of trust in Wessex Water to fairly pass on savings to customers
- Lack of detail around initiatives to reduce leakage – this topic elicited strong feelings from those customers who noticed this goal

“I’ve seen springs from the road for weeks, a great waste and it could be dealt with much more rapidly.” Customer, Salisbury

### Improvements

- Stakeholders want to see more ideas about domestic water capture and reuse
- Expedite reservoir building to increase storage capacity
- Support initiatives with behaviour change campaigns stressing the risk of drought to improve awareness and drive engagement

“Invest in educating people re the precious resource that water is and how lucky we are to be able to turn on a tap to receive it when we want it.” Customer, Taunton

“I would liked to have seen more explanation of how water supply will be secured to 2050, in the face of climate change projections, without resorting to more abstraction.” Customer, Taunton







## Outcome: Net zero carbon

- Be a net zero carbon business across our operations
- Install 100 charging points to keep electric vehicles running

Importance and Urgency Rank:

7



Customer perspective 21

- Net zero was a highly polarizing topic for customer, leading to a lower ranking vs other areas. Despite this, people from all groups have strong opinions on this high-profile issue, suggesting that targets are likely to be scrutinized.

### Positives

- Net zero goal is welcomed by many who are extremely worried about the planet's future
- Use of electric vehicles was viewed positively by these respondents

*"Making statements is all well and good' but how will it be done, is it being done in the correct way?" Customer, Bournemouth*

*"Bring forward from 2050 way to late for stopping irreversible climate and ecological catastrophe." Customer, Chippenham*

### Negatives

- A significant minority felt that net zero targets were not the best way to address the climate emergency, suggesting that it is an unobtainable and difficult to measure goal.
- Timescales are too long
- Lacks detail around how net zero will be achieved and measured
- Perception that electric vehicles are not eco-friendly due to need for disposal of batteries
- Broader questions over whether it is ever possible to reach net zero and whether Wessex Water will stick to its promises when there are so many other issues to contend with
- Tension between the environmental lobby and the consumer lobby - Considered by some a 'luxury spend' when other pressing issues to pay for
- A minority believe that climate change does not exist and do not support initiatives around it.

*"Not sure that anything can ever be net zero." Customer, Salisbury*

*"Should poor people be paying for this...?" Customer, Weston-Super-Mare*

### Improvements

- Significantly more detail around method for carbon reduction and how progress towards net zero target will be measured
- Be prepared for scrutiny

*"Writing it down in a more specific way and to understand better where the big chunks of energy or carbon emissions are in the company now and focusing on these big chunks in the first place would give me more confidence that they would achieve this outcome." Customer, Bournemouth*





## Outcome: Net zero carbon

- Be a net zero carbon business across our operations
- Install 100 charging points to keep electric vehicles running

Stakeholders were less polarised around net zero. Many had deep knowledge of the topic and were able to provide detailed recommendations for initiatives that they would like Wessex to implement. Representatives from XR and other climate groups were present at all of the face to face events, demonstrating the level of scrutiny which Wessex will be under around this topic.



## Stakeholder perspective

### Positives

- Welcomed as a contribution to combatting climate change

*"It really depends upon whether Wessex is interested in money, or in helping us to have a sustainable future."* Stakeholder

*"Would be better to mention a few specific points that they could target, e.g. energy consumption in water treatment or pumping activities."* Stakeholder

### Negatives

- Lacks detail around how net zero will be achieved and measured
  - What is **approach to methane emissions?**
  - **Why has the net zero carbon date been** brought ahead of the government target?
  - Could **EV charging points** be used by the public as well?
- Timescales are too long – the issue requires urgent action
- Suggestion that carbon-offsetting could be used was controversial
- Scepticism that Wessex are genuinely interested in this initiative over shareholder returns

*"It's a very general set of objectives, 100 new EV charging points is specific but 'being a net zero business 'across our operations' a bit vague".* Stakeholder

*"If you look at wastewater treatment, that's a big part of the carbon emissions for instance in operations, pumping is a big part of the carbon emissions ... so be more specific, where are the targets, what are they going to do within these operations?"* Stakeholder

### Improvements

- Significantly more detail around method for carbon reduction and how progress towards net zero target will be measured
- Set specific targets for emissions generated from waste treatment
- Use nature based solutions for broader benefits beyond carbon, with small amount of off setting in short term only
- Work more closely with farmers e.g. fund more sustainable methods/fertiliser use/soil sampling service/supporting existing carbon credit schemes
- Use 100% renewable energy for operations, supporting community energy installations at WW sites and land. Install solar panels on customer roofs in return for soakaways in gardens.
- Consider biogas, internal combustion capacitive electric driven vehicles





## Outcome: Great customer experience

Be the top UK water and sewerage company and improve our customer service by:

- Using technology to fix problems quicker
- Giving customers more options to contact us and improving our online self-service options
- Improving communications with customers during an event
- Extending our Priority Services scheme, providing greater support to those customers with particular needs

## Importance and Urgency Rank:

8

23

- Customer experience was not a top priority for attendees – water is a low engagement category and unless a customer has needed to get in touch with their water company, customer service tends not to be top of mind
- Acceptable customer service is seen as a hygiene factor by many, especially stakeholders

### Positives

- Customers are pleased to see Wessex Water's position at the top of the leader board for customer service
- Comments from staff demonstrated commitment to providing good customer service, suggesting they will be supportive of this Outcome Area

### Negatives

- Some hostility towards the way that performance is presented in graphs comparing customer service across companies - if all companies are performing badly this is not an accurate reflection of good customer service
- Great customer experience should be a given – having a target implies that this is not currently the case

### Improvements

- Greater **technological innovation would be welcomed** e.g. an app, which could offer the following features
  - Access to account/bill
  - Allow viewing meter readings
  - Incident tracking including real time alerts and updates.

*"Customer service shouldn't take a back seat due to lack of investment because of statutory legislation."* Staff, online survey

*"You're the best water company in the country, not that that's much of a claim."*  
Customer, Chippenham

*"This is all that needs to be achieved. The challenge will be the efficiency of achieving outcomes".* Staff, online survey







# Executive Summary



BLUE MARBLE



1

The act of consultation was welcomed by customers, staff and stakeholders and reflected well on Wessex Water. The face to face sessions in particular were effective at informing attendees and elicited views from a broad cross section of society. *NB The sample is self-selecting. Views are not necessarily reflective of the whole customer base*

2

Reaction to the plan varied across respondent type and was significantly influenced by engagement with and knowledge of the water industry. Customers generally lacked a deep understanding of the key issues and tended to assess initiatives through the lens of those areas which were highest profile or most relatable. Staff tended to be positive about their employer and their work. Stakeholders were more critical, using their more specialist knowledge to assess initiatives and challenge plans as part of their role representing the interests of customers, communities and the environment.

3

Negativity towards the privatised water industry is an issue for a significant minority across the respondent base, with the perception that stakeholder payouts have been prioritized over investment in water services and infrastructure, leading to issues which must now be fixed at the cost of customers. This may reflect the increase in prominence of the conversation around privatised industries within the political agenda since Corbyn's election pledges in 2017.

4

Whilst respondents are united in the belief that Wessex is focussing on the right things in its plan, many believe that the timescales involved are too long, that the initiatives are unambitious and lack innovation and that a greater focus is needed on collaboration to fix overarching environmental issues. Many stakeholders in particular are very negative about what they consider to be 'green fluff' to satisfy regulator targets and that the focus is delivering returns for shareholders rather than adopting more radical solutions which would require greater investment.

5

Safe and Reliable water, Effective Sewerage System, Great River and Coastal Water Quality and Affordable Bills were consistently voted the most important and urgent outcome areas, with scores significantly higher than the other four outcome areas. It is clear that those with a greater depth of knowledge believe that the linked Outcome Areas for Sewerage and Water Quality are the top priority and require urgent attention.





BLUE MARBLE

[www.bluemarbleresearch.co.uk](http://www.bluemarbleresearch.co.uk)

