

WATER EFFICIENCY AND AFFORDABILITY TACKLING THEM IN PARTNERSHIP AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

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In partnership with:

Consumer Council for Water, Southern Water and Brighton & Hove City Council

CONTENTS

Foreword	5
1. Nine overarching recommendations	6
2. Pressing issues: water efficiency and affordability	8
3. Southern Water: a region under water stress	9
4. Community Water Partnership	10
5. Insights on domestic water use	12
Identifying the Water Saving Project	12
Challenges to the Water Saving Project	13
Living with water debt	14
6. Improving the programme	16
Identifying households	16
Contacting households	17
Engaging households	19
7. Further recommendations	20
Collaborating	20
Focusing	21
Shifting perspective	21
8. Further information	22



FOREWORD

Climate change and our growing population are putting increasing pressure on our water resources. That presents enormous challenges for water companies, particularly those – like Southern Water – that operate in a region in serious water stress where the pressures are even more acute. Raising awareness of these challenges, what companies are doing to address them and, importantly, identifying innovative ways to help people to use water more efficiently are all key elements of the wider efforts to safeguard the future of our water supplies.



This report summarises the findings of the strategic, collaborative partnership between Southern Water, the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater), Brighton & Hove City Council and the University of Sussex. The Community Water Partnership sought to explore the wider benefits that can be achieved through a targeted approach that combined both water efficiency and affordability. In particular, we considered the potential for this vehicle for customer engagement to be used to deliver wider benefits by helping to make water bills more affordable.

CCWater's previous research shows that it is imperative that we help consumers understand the 'bigger picture' surrounding the future of our water resources and explain why their actions in relation to water use really matter. This is not confined to water saving as water efficiency can also deliver other benefits too, such as saving money on energy bills and establishing a more positive relationship between the customer and the water company.

All the partners in this project were interested in engaging with households that might usually be more difficult to reach with water-saving messages, but also could benefit from financial savings given that many live in low-income communities. The report highlights the benefits of, and further potential for, wider collaborative working to help maximise the level of assistance provided. Participating customers were given tailored water-efficiency gadgets and advice, and were assessed to ensure they were on the most appropriate water tariff for their circumstances. The high rate of metering in Southern Water's region meant it was possible to explore whether this may have resulted in water and financial savings too.

Some customers also took part in semi-structured interviews to share their experiences. This gave us extra insight and understanding of their attitudes towards water use and the reasons why some practices are more difficult to change. Likewise, local knowledge proved to be helpful in promoting the project and increasing engagement with the community. All useful learning points.

We hope that the findings and lessons learned from this project will help inform and shape future policy development and encourage further collaborative partnerships.

Karen Gibbs, Senior Policy Manager
Consumer Council for Water
October 2019

1 / NINE OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Overall our research has highlighted that a focus on both water affordability and efficiency benefits low-income communities. We recommend that water companies should safeguard and extend joint working between teams responsible for efficiency and affordability. The water company working with the local authority is a model that can be replicated across the UK.

2

Water and energy companies have priority service registers of vulnerable households that need extra help – for example, in the case of interrupted energy or water supplies, or with understanding bills. When these households go through the process of being added to the registers, they could also be told of other schemes for keeping bills down, where appropriate. As part of the community water programme, the partnership worked with a local energy cooperative; more could be done by water companies to combine water efficiency and affordability with energy and fuel poverty initiatives.

3

Our research has highlighted the benefits of water companies working with external partners. In the case of the Community Water Partnership, four different organisations collaborated to offer a range of perspectives on how to develop a water efficiency and affordability programme. Unusually in this water industry collaboration, university researchers were involved early on in developing many aspects of the programme, not just in evaluating it.¹ This approach of drawing on insights from a range of partners and the rolling evaluation provided by the university researchers worked well and could be replicated in other partnerships.

4

A community water partnership with a wider membership that includes the community and voluntary sectors would be a more effective collaboration. While many of the households we interviewed were committed to saving water, a number also faced challenges to this. The three areas we identified that could impact on water use were: particular health conditions; more frequent washing associated with religious observation; and, in some cases, high water use by children and young people, particularly if a shower was not available. Local organisations involved in financial advice, health, housing and welfare, as well as those that are faith-based may be able to help identify households with specific water needs. They also could bring different forms of legitimacy to the help and advice offered on water efficiency and affordability. The water industry should seek to involve a range of health, welfare and faith-based organisations in addressing water efficiency and affordability. It is also important that local water users are also represented in community water partnerships given they are the focus of the water efficiency and affordability programmes.

5

Our research has highlighted that many of the residents we interviewed had a wealth of knowledge on how to save water and reduce their bills, often developed over many years. This commitment to saving water we termed their 'Water Saving Project'. For some, this project had developed following the installation of a water meter and consequent fears of large bills. For others, it had roots in childhood and learning about the importance of being frugal. We recommend that the water industry draw on the knowledge that communities already have about water efficiency and affordability as peer-to-peer information exchange may carry more legitimacy. We drew on residents' knowledge to produce 'Take 12', a peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing booklet which is available for water companies to adapt for their own areas.

6

In the future, more needs to be undertaken to raise awareness of both the water visits and the affordability schemes. Southern Water is currently looking at how it can draw on the learning from this programme to increase awareness, particularly through place-based campaigns in disadvantaged communities. This approach could be trialled by other water companies, and best practice developed and exchanged.

7

The feedback we had on issues with leaks and problems with metering would also benefit from further discussions within Southern Water and the Community Water Partnership to see if more could be done to support householders who have unexpectedly high bills.

8

Given the issues found with using occupancy data, we recommend identifying households in low-income areas based on total household water use, rather than factoring in household size. However, if occupancy data becomes more reliable in the future, both approaches could work together to identify households that could potentially benefit from a targeted water affordability and efficiency programme. Additionally, households from low-income communities should be considered for future water efficiency and affordability programmes even if they do not meet a water company's definition of 'engaged'.

9

We welcome the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) consultation on how individual water use can be reduced, and we hope that the learning from the Community Water Partnership and our research can be of use. The partnership work we are undertaking locally would benefit from further cross-departmental working between Defra and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

2 / PRESSING ISSUES: WATER EFFICIENCY AND AFFORDABILITY

The 'jaws of death' has been used to describe the two lines on a graph where demand for water threatens to exceed supply.³ Sir James Bevan, chief executive of the Environment Agency, has warned that unless changes are implemented, we face this critical intersection in less than 25 years.

Sylvie: Because, obviously, you know, especially a lot of England, it's crazy, because we're not used to the really hot, hot summers, so everything dries out more. And then, obviously, in the winter we're just getting more and more flooding, so it is crazy. But, that's climate change isn't it?

Kaye: I love thunderstorms and there hasn't been any, there's been no rain, and when you look at the garden there's yellow grass and I'm like how quickly that's happened because of all this heat and everyone says that we're a rainy country. Not in the summer any more.

A quarter of a century may seem like a distant horizon, but developing new water resources from reservoirs to desalination plants can take years.⁴ For some areas of the UK the issue is even more urgent: Southern Water predicts that in its area of supply this critical juncture could be reached as early as 2030.⁵ The reasons for rising water demand are multiple and many are interlinked; however, the cause of decreasing supply can be expressed in two words: climate change.⁶ Changes to the patterns of rainfall in the UK have been attributed to anthropogenic climate change. Put simply, summer rainfall is decreasing when water demand is at its greatest.⁷ Climate change is impacting supply, while the UK's growing population is affecting demand. It is estimated that by 2050 the UK population will have increased from 65 to 75 million.⁸

While measures are being taken to increase the resilience of water supplies both now and in the future, demand is also starting to be addressed. Our changing daily practices from the 1960s onwards have led to the domestic demand for water to almost double in just 40 years. Personal hygiene is just one example of these changing practices – for many, a daily wash with a flannel has led to daily showering.⁹ However, since the late 1990s, water efficiency has helped to reduce demand, although in the past four years there has been an increase with average demand now standing at 143 litres per person per day in England and Wales.¹⁰

One of the factors that has helped to curb demand has been water metering. The effects of water metering are twofold. Primarily, the installation of meters is a demand-reduction measure but also, depending on the household, metering can also help to reduce household water bills. One report commissioned by the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) found householders who moved into a property where a water meter was already installed generally reported reduced bills. Those who had been compulsorily metered, meanwhile, did not find they were paying more.¹¹

Moreover, householders who chose to be metered felt in most cases that their bills had fallen. According to CCWater's report, this positive reaction was largely because the household size was small so metering had led to a lower bill. The report also noted that 'most of those with a meter claimed to be making efforts to reduce their consumption'. However, researchers have questioned whether switching to water meters would actually save low-income households money.¹² They argued that those most likely to make savings were low-water users that had already made the switch.

Affordability of water bills has long been a concern in the UK. The Water Industry Act 1999 guarantees that people cannot be disconnected from water and sewerage services for non-payment, unlike with electricity or gas supplies.¹³ While water bills rose following privatisation, according to the industry regulator Ofwat, increases have slowed in recent years and were in line with inflation.¹⁴ Despite this, over 10% of households in England and Wales consider their bills to be unaffordable. This equates to almost three million people, and CCWater say more should be done to raise awareness of reduced water tariffs and payment schemes.¹⁵

3 / SOUTHERN WATER: A REGION UNDER WATER STRESS

Households in the Southern Water region use significantly less water than the average for England and Wales – 129 litres per person per day compared with 143 litres. By 2040 Southern Water aims to have reduced this even further to 100 litres.¹⁶ To achieve this, it is planning to educate households about water efficiency, conduct more home water visits, offer rewards for community-wide reductions and further reduce leaks.¹⁷ This builds on reductions achieved through Southern Water's Universal Metering Programme: 87% of households in Southern Water's region of supply have water meters, compared with just over 55% across England and Wales.¹⁸ The metering programme was started in 2010 to help safeguard future water supplies in a region that was already officially classed as severely water-stressed.¹⁹ Nearly half a million water meters were compulsorily installed, resulting in a 16.5% fall in water usage for customers that received them.²⁰

As the first company to introduce universal metering, Southern Water carried out research with its customers to gauge feedback. The research highlighted that customers saw metering as a fairer way to pay for water, compared to rateable value bills. However, they wanted support in place for households that would see their water bills increase as a result of moving to a meter – for example, a larger family living in a low-rateable value property.²¹ As a result, Southern Water's metering installation programme was backed up by home visits by specially-trained engineers. They installed free water efficiency products as well as giving water-saving advice and information on reduced tariff and payment schemes that could help eligible households reduce their bills.²²



4 / COMMUNITY WATER PARTNERSHIP

Lily: I'd gone from a two-bed council house that was on a fixed rate and obviously that was a lot cheaper, and then I came here and I felt like you could probably bath in Evian for less than ... they wanted! My situation changed after not too long and I was eligible for WaterSure [a reduced tariff].

Regulators like Ofwat argue that water companies need to work more closely with a wide variety of agencies to identify and support vulnerable households.²³ Academic research suggests that partnership working is important to address both water affordability and efficiency issues.²⁴ This report summarises how Brighton and Hove became one of the first areas in the country to use a partnership approach to address both water efficiency and affordability in one programme. The Community Water Partnership brought together the Consumer Council for Water, the statutory consumer body for the water industry; Southern Water, the water supplier for the region; Brighton & Hove City Council, which is responsible for 11,000 social housing properties; and researchers at the University of Sussex.

Factors associated with households finding bills unaffordable include having an income of less than £10,000 per annum; being in receipt of benefits or having a disability; and living in rented accommodation, whether private, council or housing association tenancies.²⁵ As a result, the partnership decided to focus its water efficiency and affordability programme on social housing belonging to the city council – much of which is located in low-income communities.

The Community Water Partnership aimed to:

- address water efficiency and affordability together
- focus support on social housing tenants with higher than average water consumption for the number of people living in the household
- understand how they use water in their day-to-day lives, challenges they face in reducing water bills, and the influence of the water visit
- prioritise experimentation and learning to improve its water efficiency and affordability programme
- explore different approaches to identify households for a water visit, methods for contacting them and ways to engage to support water use and bill reduction.

EVOLUTION OF THE WATER-SAVING VISIT

The Community Water Partnership built on the learning from Southern Water's metering programme and its current offer to its customers of a free water-saving visit. The Community Water Partnership's water efficiency and affordability programme included the following:

1. On entering the home, the engineer would ask the householder a number of questions to find out how water was used in the home.
2. They then undertook a tour of the property, in effect a 'water walk', if possible alongside the householder. This involved testing flows and assessing water efficiency products already in place, and fitting new ones where appropriate and possible. The products included 'Save-a-Flush' toilet bags, tap aerators, dual flush converters, water-efficient showerheads and shower timers. It also involved fixing leaking toilets and adjusting service valves.

Bridget: The showerhead that I was using and the tap that I was using in the bathroom were all using a lot more water. He changed the devices on them for me to make them a lot more efficient ... He put another bag in the flush for me.

3. The house tour was then followed by a laptop presentation about water efficiency, talking about potential behavioural changes the household could consider. The engineer would also give estimates of how much water could be saved through routine changes and the installation of the new water efficiency products.
4. The household was then given leaflets on saving water and on the help available to manage water bills.
5. All the social housing tenants taking part in the water visit were then contacted by Southern Water's affordability team to be offered an assessment to see if they were eligible for a reduction in their bills.

Following the research

The engineers now draw more attention to the leaflets on water tariffs and payment schemes by taking them out of the envelope and handing them to the householder. If requested, engineers can supply application forms for the different tariffs and payment schemes, along with a stamped addressed envelope. If they have left an application form, they notify Southern Water so the affordability team can follow this up. For example, householders might want assistance in filling out the forms.

Jenny: He just turned the valve a little bit so there is less pressure coming through ... It doesn't make any difference whatsoever to your shower or washing your hands. The only difference is the cold tap up in the bathroom doesn't splash all over the place now, and that's it.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX RESEARCH

The aims of the partnership were underpinned by academic research. The main focus of this research was a set of in-depth interviews in 2018 with 31 households living in council properties who had taken part in a water visit. This sample was made up of 57% of all the households who had a water visit during the first phase of the Community Water Partnership. The research generated rich, qualitative data into how households use and save water, as well the influence of the water visit. It also helped identify significant issues such as the impact of leaks, unexpectedly high water bills and the effects of certain health conditions on water use, such as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

In addition, the research was focused on supporting the partners in improving the water efficiency and affordability programme as it evolved. This involved attending partnership meetings; examining billing data for information on water use; observing community events and door-to-door calls to engage householders; and accompanying engineers on water visits.

The research has generated a number of insights and recommendations that are detailed in a full report.²⁶ This executive summary highlights the key findings and has been written to share the lessons learned from the research and the wider partnership with policymakers and practitioners interested in water efficiency and affordability.



5 / INSIGHTS ON DOMESTIC WATER USE

IDENTIFYING THE WATER SAVING PROJECT

We set out to understand how water is used in the home and embedded in daily routines. We found that many households were committed to some degree of water saving, even before their water visit. For some, it started with their first experience of a water meter and consequent fears about a large bill. Others were motivated by environmental concerns, such as Farah who told us, 'Even though our water bill is capped, it still doesn't mean I like wasting water. I still don't like that. Saving water is [also] for the environment. It's better all around.' Others were influenced by childhood experiences, such as Courtney who told us, 'Mum used to have a bath; we used to get in after. There's no point emptying the bath, running a new one, emptying the bath, five times, is there?' We term this commitment the 'Water Saving Project'²⁷ as households explicitly undertook tasks to fulfil it – from sharing bath water to collecting cold water from taps while they waited for it to run hot.

However, in a number of cases, interest in the Water Saving Project had waned, for example after a household had got over the shock of having a water meter installed. Our research highlighted that the water visit had the potential to re-energise this project. Dan explained how his family's showering practices changed after the water engineer swapped the showerhead for a more water-efficient version: 'I notice a difference in the showers, especially with my lads as well. They're not in there as long as they used to be ... I think because it's more powerful now. It really comes out.'

Sometimes fittings in the home were not compatible with Southern Water's devices, so the engineers started to adjust valves that regulate the flow of water to bathroom or kitchen taps. This was backed up by offering plumbing services if this adjustment led to problems.



Julie: My husband, he would fill [the kettle] right up to the six cups, and if it was just for me and him like, because I've been brought up by my mum, and that's what my mum's like if she comes: 'Just fill it up to the two.' Because, it's also your water and your energy that it's saving on.

John: We had five children and, when we came here, we'd never been on a meter. Because it was all new to us, we didn't know how it would affect us with five children, and there was only me working, money-wise. So, we literally started on [water saving] straightaway.

Farah: In our religion, wasting is sin. Wasting anything is sin ... so we don't want to waste water.

Sarah: Yeah, [the engineer who did the water visit] did give us a timer because we've got teenage boys. They like to do their hair and make sure they have a shower for long periods of time. So now we go by the timer.
Interviewer: Okay, and how is that working? Are they keeping to the timer?
Sarah: Sometimes they do, but sometimes they don't.

CHALLENGES FOR THE WATER SAVING PROJECT

Despite the many households who were committed to the Water Saving Project, there were also challenges to keeping track of water consumption and keeping bills down. One reason for this appeared to be faults with the water meters or leaks – both inside the house and external to the property. Both were raised during the interviews, but the quantitative data also suggested that these might be issues for some households. Out of 55 households whose water use was examined before and after the water visit as part of this research, we had to exclude 10 from this analysis as the water meter readings were improbably high, low or static.²⁸

In the 45 households where data could be used, there was a mean average reduction in water use of 5.79% following a water-saving visit. However, it is important to look beneath this headline figure. Of these 45 households, 11 showed little change (quantitative change of +/-5% on their previous use), 22 households made reductions of more than 5%, and 12 households saw an increase of more than 5%.

The interviews suggest some possible explanations for those households that saw an increase in water use. First, the impact of a health condition. For example, Justin had problems with his mobility and was registered disabled. As a result, he might need to use the shower several times a day to keep clean and this was reflected in ongoing high water bills. Another householder, Lisa, who lives with her partner and child, had OCD which led to intensive water use.

Second, more frequent washing was also associated with observance to some religious practices. For example, as Farah explained: 'Because we're Muslims we pray five times a day, so before five prayers we need to have five ... it's not a very long wash, it's a small wash, but it's five washes ... You can't turn it off and do a bit, and then turn it on and do another bit. It's not possible ... You need to have running water to do the cleaning.' A mixer tap would have enabled her family to run hot and cold water together and reduce the amount of water used.

Lisa: My washing machine could be on about five times a day. There's only three of us ... Do you know what I mean? The uniform has to be washed every day, we only use a towel once and then it gets put in the wash. It's all sorts. Bedding could be done two or three times a week, anything...

Third, higher water use appeared to be strongly associated with children and young people in some households, particularly if a shower was not available. Young children could be asked to share water in a bath, but as they got older this was not appropriate. Some developed more 'attentive cleaning' practices²⁹ for themselves and their clothing and towels, which could be out of step with others in the family. Joan told us that her younger daughter could have two or three baths or showers a day: 'She holds court. I can hear her on the phone, she's in the bath ... I know she's topping the bath up ... It drives me mad. It doesn't matter what time of night, she'll have a bath. If she wants a bath, she'll have a bath.' As children got older, they could get fussier about the clothes they were putting on, but also be disorganised about which were clean or dirty, which resulted in unnecessary washing.

LIVING WITH WATER DEBT

While the interviewees were selected on their water consumption, rather than their payment history, a number talked about issues of water debt. Some of them had received large bills out of the blue, which they thought must be to do with a leak or a meter error. Others had seen water debt build up, particularly when their income was shifting due to benefit changes or they had health issues. Sylvie had had health problems and got into debt with the water company. She eventually called them and was put on a payment scheme.

Sylvie explained: 'Yes. You've just got to do it, you've just got to phone them and do it, you know. So, I just phoned them up, and just explained to them, you know, that I'm struggling, and I can't afford it. It's too much money, and that's when they put me on the payment plan, £35 [a month].' She also told us it was relatively common knowledge that a household would not be disconnected for not paying water bills, but explained that did not stop her from wanting to pay off the debt: 'Because, if you don't, they get bailiffs at the door ... I've already had bailiffs at my door once before, and I don't want them coming back. It wasn't a nice experience, it frightened me, so never again...'

Frankie did not pay her water bill for almost a year having suffered with depression and anxiety. She said that she had not thought to look for help and got into debt

Frankie: I've got arthritis in my back. I suffer with depression, anxiety, panic attacks, so when I feel really low, down, depressed, I go and soak in the bath. It is important to me. I mean people have said to me, 'You should get a shower; it's nice and quick.' Yeah, it is and I totally agree, but in the evening-wise I don't go out that much so that's my relaxing time in the bath, you know.

Claire: It was £40 a month for a long, long time, and there were never any problems. Then all of a sudden, I had a letter saying that I owed over £1,000 which wasn't being covered by my payments. So, of course, I was a bit freaked out. One of the things they told me to look into was whether I had a leak in the property, so I did. I got the council in to have a look, and I did have quite a big leak ... it was under the bath.

for a number of different household expenses which led to a court summons. However, she also told us how much she relied on having a bath as a way of coping with a number of health issues.

For some households, having a payment scheme helped to take some of the worry away from debt. As Lisa described: 'Yeah, it was a weight lifted off the shoulders because at the end of the day you just don't want to be in debt. You don't want people knocking on your doors ... another letter coming through the door, and this can happen and that can happen.'

The data revealed that the Community Water Partnership programme resulted in a significant increase in the number of participating households accessing help with their water bills. So, while only 16 out of the 55 households we studied were already on a scheme to manage bills, this doubled to 32 households following the water visit. As Beth revealed: 'I am only paying £30 a month which, before, was a good £60 a month.' Tom also ended up with a significant reduction after being assessed following the water visit: '[I'm] a pensioner and I've got lots of things wrong with me. I was paying £70-odd a month, I think, for water and now it's £30.'

While Southern Water has well-established tariffs and schemes in place to assist low-income households and those with special health needs for water, it was striking how many of the households we spoke to did not know about them prior to the water visit. This raises the question of how many households not reached by the partnership are also on the wrong tariffs and how this can be reduced in the future. This reflects a report by the Consumer Council for Water which highlights that for water companies in general, awareness of affordability schemes remains low.³⁰

Barry: Surely to disabled people, to senior citizens and things like that, these discounts and bonuses should be automatically done, or at least advised that they can be automatically done ... The warden here, she's been doing the job for twenty-odd years, she didn't even know about it.



6 / IMPROVING THE PROGRAMME

IDENTIFYING HOUSEHOLDS

The Community Water Partnership experimented with different ways to identify households who could potentially benefit from a water-saving visit and an affordability assessment. It decided to focus on water efficiency by identifying households with higher than expected water use given the number of residents. Initially, Southern Water examined its water consumption data alongside an estimate from Brighton & Hove City Council of the number of people living in its social housing. The combined data aimed to identify which households had consumption that was 10% above the average for that size of household. A second criterion was added to filter out households that used less than 140m³ a year to ensure that the partnership could manage the number of people to be contacted. A third criterion drew on Southern Water’s definition of an ‘engaged’ customer as someone who is up to date with their bills, made a payment in the past 75 days or had been in contact with the company over the same period. Southern Water felt that ‘engaged’ customers would be more likely to take up the offer of a water visit. Additionally, the city council did not want the programme to be associated in any way with debt recovery.

In practice it was time-consuming for council staff to go through their tenancy database to find out how many people were living at each property and this had to be fitted around their usual work. This led to the work being divided into batches resulting in three lists of households to contact between August 2016 and March 2018. As a result, 522 households were identified to be approached. Unfortunately, the data only represents a snapshot of occupancy as this can change due to babies being born, children growing up and leaving, or family members moving in, and so on. Furthermore, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) introduced additional challenges to identifying eligible households.

These challenges led Southern Water to find a different way to identify households to be offered a water visit from February 2019. Instead of combining its information on water use with council data, Southern Water purchased a proprietary database based on electoral register information and modelled data to estimate household headcount. The database saved time and was reasonably accurate in predicting the number of adults in the household and whether there were children. However, it was much less accurate at estimating the number of children, which our research highlights is often critical to understanding how water is used in the home.³¹ One way to resolve this in the future is to first look at total annual water consumption in a household, irrespective of the number of occupants. This is not just because of the difficulties in establishing reliable occupancy data; it also recognises that residents of social housing may be on a lower income, which raises affordability issues even if their water use per person is below average. While this approach shifts the identification of households from a focus on efficiency to affordability, it can still address water use given that these households still have high overall consumption.

Jenny: My youngest son makes loads of mess with water in general and taking too long in the shower, flushing the toilet too often, leaving the tap running when brushing his teeth and we’ve just had to explain to him about ... wastage in general and ... about his own level of washing. Constantly putting clothes in the wash that don’t need to be washed.

CONTACTING HOUSEHOLDS

The partnership also explored how best to contact households to take part in the programme. It made little difference whether the first contact was made by the council or the company delivering water visits on behalf of Southern Water – response rates in both cases were relatively low (11% and 8% of calls). Following suggestions from the researchers, the partnership experimented with a place-based approach focusing on Whitehawk, a Brighton community in the bottom 10% most deprived in the country.³²

In September 2018, over a five-week period, the Community Water Partnership undertook the following awareness-raising activities:

- A publicity campaign including local media and posters at local bus stops.
- A week-long series of community events, where leaflets and advice were offered. This included attending a children’s centre, library and food bank. Where possible Southern Water’s education bus was also in attendance. A particularly popular venue was a local discount supermarket.
- House-to-house door-knocking to invite local people to sign up for a free water visit. This activity took place at different times (between 9am–7pm on weekdays and 10am–3pm on Saturdays).



Examples from the publicity campaign

The uptake of water visits was similar to the telephone calls; however, many more were arranged in a short space of time given the intensity of door-knocking – 1,853 households were approached in five weeks. Given this, the Community Water Partnership held two further place-based events in other areas of the city. However, while there were more water appointments as a result of the campaign, Southern Water estimated that this approach resulted in a threefold increase in visits to households who were already water efficient compared with the targeted phone calls. Equally, the water affordability team did not consider the individual approach to be effective. While it was important that the engineer left affordability information during the water visit and alerted Southern Water to anyone who was looking for assistance, individually contacting households following a water visit did not give a sufficiently high rate of return in terms of sign-ups to reduced tariffs and payment schemes.

Cara: We go to the [Brighton] Unemployed Family Centre up there, we go and get [my husband's] major forms filled in up there ... you just go up there and they'll help you. But I think ... people think, 'It's too complicated for me, I'm not going to be able to do this.'

Using the learning from the Community Water Partnership programme, Southern Water is now exploring how to refine this place-based approach within disadvantaged communities to address both water efficiency and affordability. As our recommendations highlight, this place-based approach would benefit from widening the partnership so that other channels embedded in the local area and its community are used to engage with householders. This could entail local residents, as well as a range of organisations including those working on debt, health and sustainability and those that are faith-based. This wider water partnership could also branch out beyond the sustainability team at the local authority to other colleagues focused on resident and community engagement, and financial inclusion. All may offer more acceptable forms of support around water use, particularly for those households facing significant challenges.

Bridget: The thing that we do most [since the visit] is have the bucket in the shower ... I was wasting quite a lot of water waiting for it to be hot enough to get into, and he [the water engineer] suggested just saving that water, which is what we do. We've got a big bucket now in the bath and we catch the water and then as soon as it's hot we get in and move the bucket and use that for watering the vegetables.

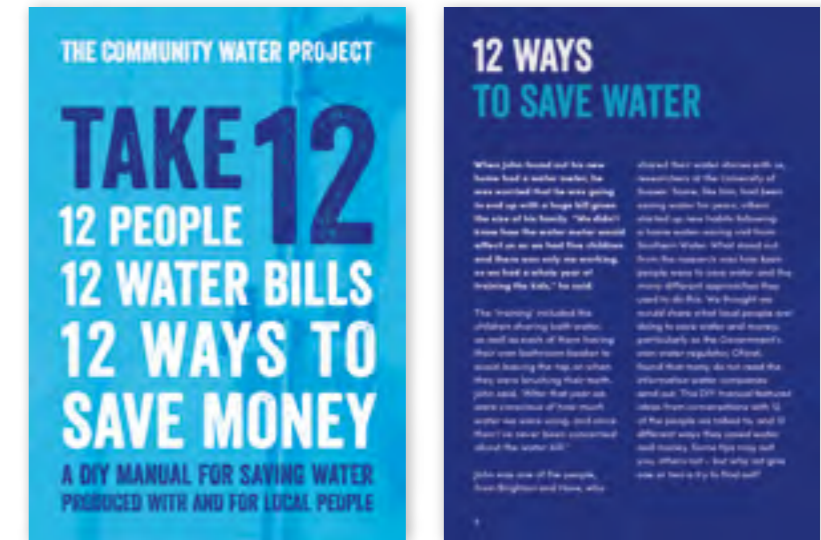
Sarah: The guy that came here gave so much information, it's made us realise how much water was actually important, because we did actually take it for granted. So, the guy that came here, he explained how it all works and now it's like, actually, if we do run out of water, that's something we are concerned about. So, we do check everything now and recycle water as well.

Karen: Yeah, it's like recycling, I'd been concerned more about that than the water, if you know what I mean, because of the landfills ... [Then] the man come along and telling me about ... [water] and then it got me thinking about it. But before that I was just recycling mental, weren't I?

ENGAGING HOUSEHOLDS

Many of the householders we spoke to engaged with the water visit. They appreciated how it was tailored to their situation. Karen liked the engineer walking around with her to assess where to put water-saving equipment: '...normally they'd just say "In the bathroom do this, do that", but he actually went in...'

However, going forward we would like to see greater recognition in the water visits that many households already have a wealth of knowledge on ways to save water. Given this, we produced a leaflet based on the interviews. The 'Take 12' leaflet features 12 of the interviewees and their experiences of using and saving water. Using focus groups, the draft was shared with seven households who had taken part in the water visits, and their comments were reflected in the final version. The leaflet is available in PDF form from <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sociology/research/research-projects/community-water-partnership> so other areas of the country can use or adapt it, if helpful.



Though the leaflet reflected people's engagement with water saving, it was striking that some had not made the link with the environment before the water visit. Bridget started on her Water Saving Project after a meter was installed in her home, but the visit transformed her engagement with it. For the first time she had, in her own words, understood 'the bigger picture', by which she meant seeing water-saving as benefiting the environment as well as her finances.

Our research has also shown that if we are to support households in changing their water consumption, we need to shift perspectives. As the Consumer Council for Water has highlighted, it may not be enough just to offer a few tips on how to save water. People need to understand why it is important to save water before giving them information about how to do it.³³ Our research has demonstrated that many of the people we interviewed are already tuned into not wasting resources, but we also found that a number of them welcomed the water engineer sharing their passion for the environment and the importance of saving water.

7 / FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy report is a summary of an extended report that can be downloaded from <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sociology/research/research-projects/community-water-partnership>. In addition to the overarching recommendations highlighted in Chapter 1 of this report, we have a number of more detailed ones for consideration:

COLLABORATING

- Where relationships can be forged with councils, water companies should work with them given their community links and potential to engage householders around water affordability and efficiency. This could involve mobilising a wider range of council employees such as those in Neighbourhood Teams. We recommend that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government works with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to promote the importance of water efficiency in local government policy.
- If the council also provides social housing, water companies should work with them to share knowledge about water and bill savings with their tenants. Water efficiency should be considered by all social housing providers when specifying new-build and refurbishment projects, and take into account the cost of measures versus the water efficiency and affordability benefits to future tenants.
- The Community Water Partnership needs to consider widening its members. For example, to include local organisations involved in financial advice, health, housing and welfare to ensure households facing affordability challenges are offered meaningful support. Local partners, especially those from the community and voluntary sectors and faith-based organisations, can bring different forms of legitimacy and a closer understanding of people's lives.
- Southern Water should look to align water-saving initiatives with work on energy efficiency and gas safety, reaching out to the energy network providers, energy retailers where possible, cooperatives and other organisations already delivering programmes on fuel poverty. For example, the programme developed links with Brighton and Hove Energy Saving Cooperative (BHESCO) to offer people information on energy and water tariffs. It would also be good to see more collaborative work across utility companies to jointly deliver support on water and energy efficiency and affordability.
- Southern Water could explore interest in a wider group of organisations working with low-income communities to develop a community of practice on water affordability and efficiency. This could offer insights to groups such as the Greater Brighton Economic Board, who are currently developing an infrastructure plan, and the Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere.

Claire: I have a gas and electricity key which I top up, so I'm probably more aware than most people how much energy I'm using. So I know that, say the family have been staying for a while and I've done a lot of washing, I notice that the electricity will need topping up a lot more regularly.

FOCUSING

- It is important that Southern Water continues to work on ways to improve the identification of households with specific water needs including working more closely with a range of organisations as discussed above.
- Given the issues associated with using household-size data we recommend that Southern Water pilot a new approach for identifying households living in low-income areas based on total annual household consumption, contacted through calls or door-knocking. We would like to see the company combine this with a place-based campaign, i.e. engaging households via community settings, events and networks.
- We would recommend such a targeted place-based campaign should be run by a community engagement professional.

Laura: Sometimes, if I've put the washing on and there's a pair of jeans in there ... I go 'what's your jeans doing in the basket for ... You've only worn them once'. My son who's got OCD, I think ... sometimes he'd get changed three times on one day.

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE

- We recommend that Southern Water pilot a more conversational, knowledge-sharing water-saving visit by using the 'Take 12' leaflet. This is based on the experience of water-saving by social housing tenants from Brighton and Hove. This approach would work well with the existing 'water walk' around the home.
- The water visit should include more key facts about water saving and the environment. While sharing insights of the 'big picture' is helpful, they should also be more tailored to the local area.
- We welcome that the engineers now hand the affordability leaflets directly to the householder taking part in the water visit. More generally, we would like to see as many opportunities as possible where the work on water affordability and water efficiency can be cross-referenced and promoted by Southern Water.
- Southern Water could also look for ways to involve more of the family or household with the water visits, especially teenagers who can become high users. Schoolchildren can and do pass on information to their parents on the need to save water following talks at school. For future campaigns, Southern Water could combine a school talk with information in schoolbook bags for parents, as well as the appearance of its water education bus at school drop-off and pick-up times.
- We recommend that in the future, the Community Water Partnership works with all households who have potential water affordability issues whether they fit Southern Water's 'engaged' criteria or not.
- We support Southern Water's plans to give householders more frequent and up-to-date water consumption data to avoid large bills building up and becoming debt – e.g. a commitment to switch to more frequent meter reads and allowing customers to see how their water use changes through the year.³⁴

Bridget: Yeah and as I said, when I did get the meter, it was only on money, financial side of things, nothing to do with the environment but ... I'm not doing it to save money now, I'm doing it to do my bit, being as frugal as I can with the water and using it to the best of its ability rather than just sloshing it around willy-nilly.

8 / FURTHER INFORMATION

The full report, **Water Efficiency and Affordability: Tackling Them in Partnership** is available to download from <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sociology/research/research-projects/community-water-partnership>, along with the 'Take 12' peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing leaflet. If you wish to adapt the leaflet for use in your area, please let the research team know.

To contact the University of Sussex team or find out more about this research, email: c.will@sussex.ac.uk. To contact the Community Water Partnership, email: ben.earl@southernwater.co.uk

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In order to ensure all the interviewees remain anonymous, we have changed names and some details. Where necessary, we have slightly amended quotations to aid readability. None of the photographs are of people who took part in the water visit but are used for illustrative purposes only.

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