

South Staffs Water (SSW) – Comparison of recent SSW and CCWater research for CCG

Background

The purpose of this paper is to compare, where possible, the recent SSW research ‘Engaging with customers – customer service priorities and willingness to pay’, published in November 2012, with the SSW results in the last published CCWater ‘Annual Tracking Survey 2011’, published in March 2012.

The purpose of the comparison is to provide information to the Customer Challenge Group and further context for the discussions around market research. The CCWater Annual Tracking Survey 2011 has been selected for comparison for two key reasons. First, it is the most recent published domestic research undertaken by CCWater and secondly, 2011 was the first time that CCWater published results for individual Water Only Companies.

While the two research exercises were undertaken with different key objectives, there are a number of areas which can be usefully compared. Although the CCWater research was national, this paper compares only the results polled from SSW’s customers, recognising that demographics and bill levels vary greatly across the country.

Datasets

South Staffs Water research was undertaken in October 2012, CCWater’s research took place in December 2011.

In addition, it should be noted that the two research exercises used different data-gathering methods. SSW’s research consisted of 461 online questionnaires and 150 face-to-face interviews, while CCWater’s took the form of telephone interviews.

	South Staffs research	CCWater research
Numbers of customers (domestic)	611	151
Number of customers (business)	108	
Tolerance	95% confidence level = $\pm 4\%$ domestic and $\pm 6\%$ business	Confidence interval at 10% or 90% = $\pm 4.8\%$ domestic

Summary of key comparisons

The SSW research included unprompted and informed views. For a more direct comparison, the results compared are the unprompted results from domestic customers only.

Overall, the results of CCWater’s research are generally more positive than SSW’s, particularly on the question of overall value for money. Most results, however, are not too dissimilar, when tolerance levels are taken into account.

The differences in research could be due to any number of factors. One possibility could be the higher profile of water in the media over 2012, due to the drought and hosepipe bans earlier in the year, quickly followed by floods.

The table below shows key comparisons between the research results for domestic customers only.

Subject area	South Staffs Water research	CCWater research
Overall satisfaction	84%	88%
Appearance	81%	88%
Taste and smell	78% and 81%	87%
Pressure	77%	84%
Satisfaction with hardness	56%	72%
Value for money	68%	71%
Affordability		76%
Contacted company in last 12 months	27%	9%
Satisfied with contact	85%	92%

Overall satisfaction

Similar levels of satisfaction were recorded in both research exercises, with 84% of those polled very or fairly satisfied in SSW's research compared to 88% in CCWater's.

Both showed that those with a medical reliance on water were least satisfied with the existing service, although in SSW's research, which is the only one with relevant data, the majority of these were, nevertheless, very or fairly satisfied.

Satisfaction levels with individual elements of the service were also compared from both sets of research:

Satisfaction with taste, smell and appearance

When asked to rate levels of satisfaction with different aspects of their services, SSW's research showed that customers rated satisfaction with the appearance and smell of their water highest at 81%, followed by taste at 78%. CCWater's research asked customers for their views of colour and appearance and taste and smell separately and these recorded satisfaction of 88% and 87% respectively.

Again, CCWater's research suggested that customers with a disability or long term health condition were less likely to be satisfied with the colour and appearance of their water.

Satisfaction with water pressure

CCWater's research resulted in higher levels of satisfaction with water pressure at 84%, while SSW's research showed satisfaction at 77%.

Satisfaction with hardness

SSW's research showed satisfaction of 56% in this area, compared to 72% in CCWater's research. In SSW's initial willingness to pay information, from the same research, however, 89% of domestic customers indicated that they would prefer the current level of service with no bill change, while only 9% were willing to pay £1 per year for an improvement in water hardness.

Value for money

SSW's research showed a satisfaction level of 68% with value for money of water services, while CCWater's showed 71%. SSW's research did not ask for customers' views of the affordability of water bills, but CCWater's research indicated satisfaction with affordability of 76%. 38% of customers polled in SSW's research indicated that they did not know how much their bill was and only 3% were willing to pay £1 extra per year to offer discounts to those who have difficulty paying.

Contact with the company

The greatest disparity between the two sets of research was in the number of customers polled who said they had contacted the company in the last 12 months – 27% of customers in SSW's research said they had made contact in the last year, compared to just 9% in CCWater's research. However, satisfaction with the way the contact was dealt with was high in both research results – 85% in SSW's research and 92% in CCWater's.

Conclusion

While the number of results from these two sets of research which can be directly compared was limited, due to the differing key objectives, it appears that there is some consistency of views across the research, within the specified tolerance levels.

Overall, both sets of research show high levels of satisfaction across most elements of water services, with room for improvement, but little appetite to fund improvements, in some areas.

In addition, the results should be considered alongside the company's SIM scores, as these directly record a customer's experience of dealing with the company.