



Research report

Water Transfer – Customer Acceptability
Hall tests and Focus Groups

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Background & objectives

Background

The UK mainland sees quite extreme differential conditions in respect of availability of resources of fresh water. In essence, some parts (mainly the north and west) see the highest rainfall and have access to large natural water sources in lakes and reservoirs, whilst some parts (mainly the south and south east) have a lot less natural rainfall and experience drought-like conditions more readily.

There has long been discussion about how best to provide effective resilience nationally for water resources and the government expects the water industry to take a leadership role in solving the problem. United Utilities has, with industry partner Severn Trent Water, stepped forward with a proposal to ensure resilience in future, known as The Severn Thames Water Transfer scheme.



Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore customer reactions to the proposition that, from time to time, the water quality (hardness) that they experience may deviate from their usual blend.

The main objective:

“To provide insight on customers’ attitudes to changes in drinking water quality relating to changes made to balance water resources more widely.”

Specifically:

1. What impacts are acceptable to customers, and where are any thresholds where acceptability tails off
2. Are there any key differences across the region in what is or isn't acceptable
3. Does the reason for the use of water make any difference to customers perceptions/attitudes/acceptability of change
4. How should United Utilities communicate with customers about any planned changes to water quality to help mitigate any concerns and what language would work best in communicating with customers and with the public at large about such issues.

Methodology

Two approaches

Online Survey (Dec 2020)

- An online approach was adopted to survey household customers using customer sample
- A mix of a core representative sample of customers across the United Utilities region. And a ‘boosted’ sample which represented those likely to be most impacted

Focus Groups and Hall tests (Nov 2021 – Jan 2022)

- 9 Focus groups
- 12 Hall tests
- Spread across 4 different areas of UU’s region (Crewe, Wythenshawe, Southport, Widnes)
- Across multiple days customers tested samples of different levels of hardness/softness

This report will focus on the hall tests and discussion groups. The results from the online survey are in a separate report



No. of interviews with each Twort level						
Location	1	2	3	4	5	6
Crewe	62	98	98	36	-	-
Wythenshawe	150	90	109	101	-	-
Widnes	101	196	99	95	47	-
Southport	-	54	46	-	149	149

Focus Groups and Hall tests

4 locations were selected based on a few different criteria. Each location had supplies with differing Twort levels, and some areas were more likely than others to be affected by water transfer activity in the future.

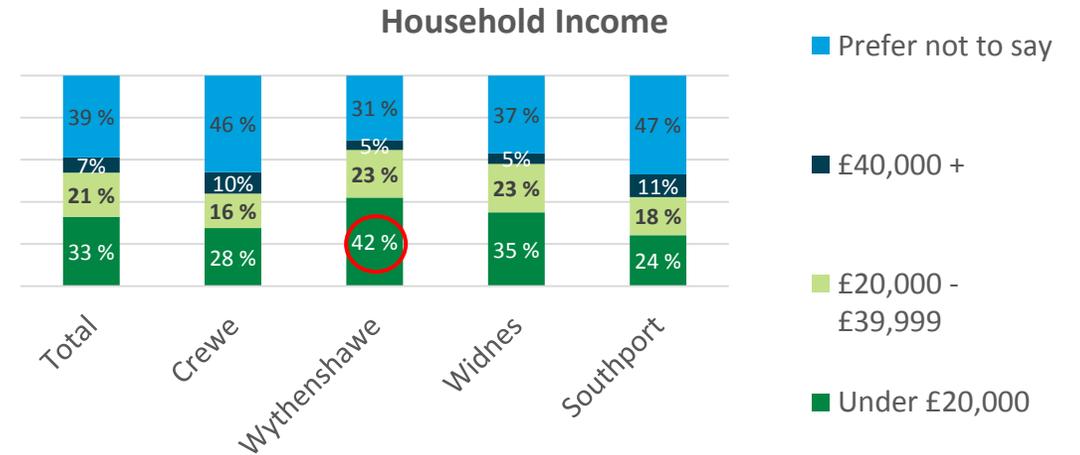
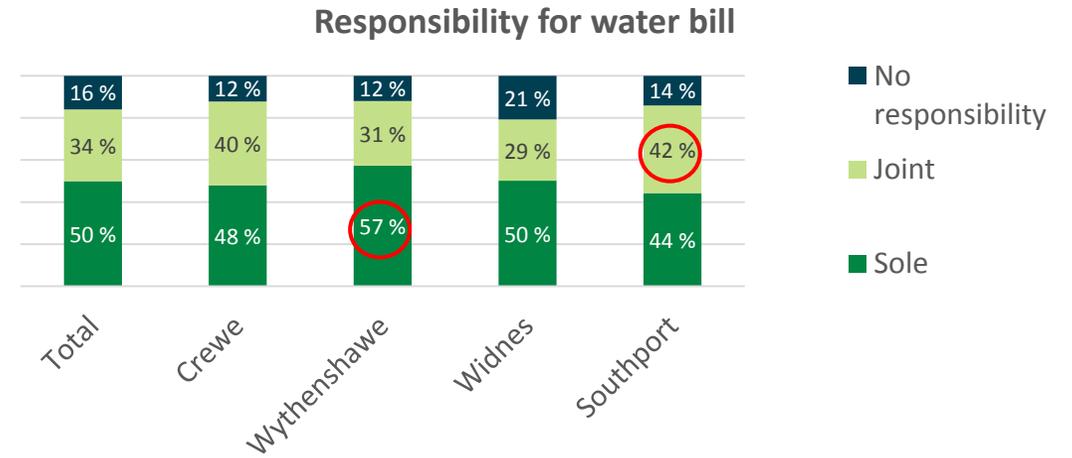
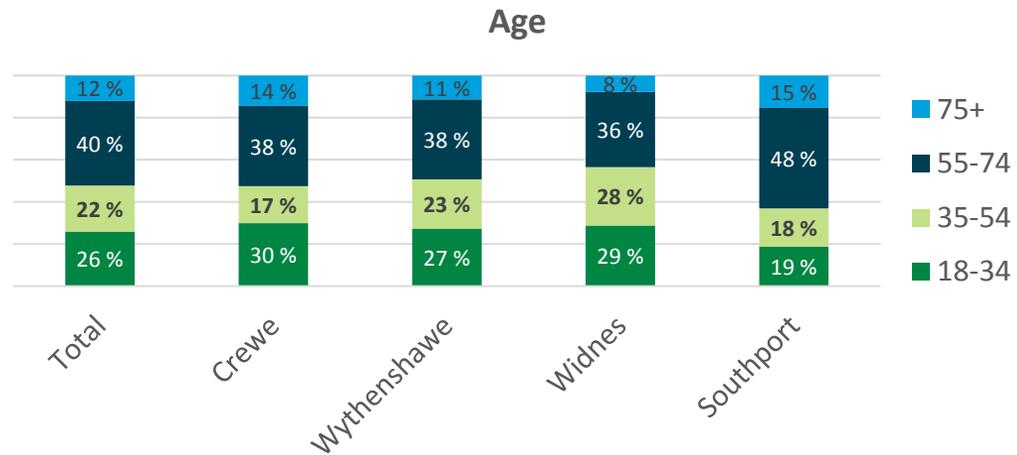
With the exception of the pilot, which took part in Crewe and was pre recruited, participants were recruited off the nearby streets and invited to test different Twort levels in nearby hotels and event halls. 3 hall tests were conducted per location.

Focus groups were pre recruited via DJS's local recruitment network. 2 focus groups were conducted per location.

Sample

Sample 1

Despite quotas not being set, demographics did not vary much by area.



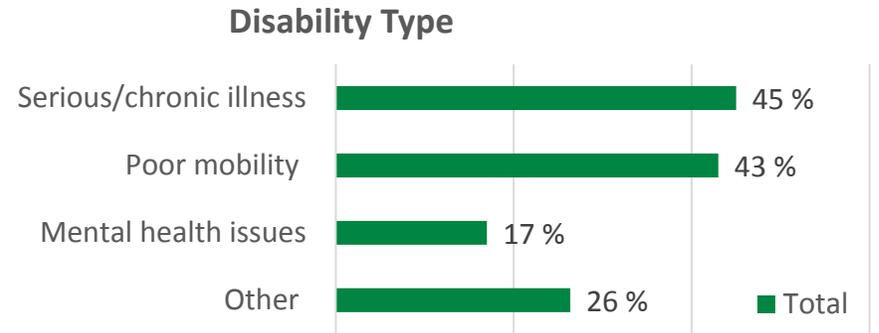
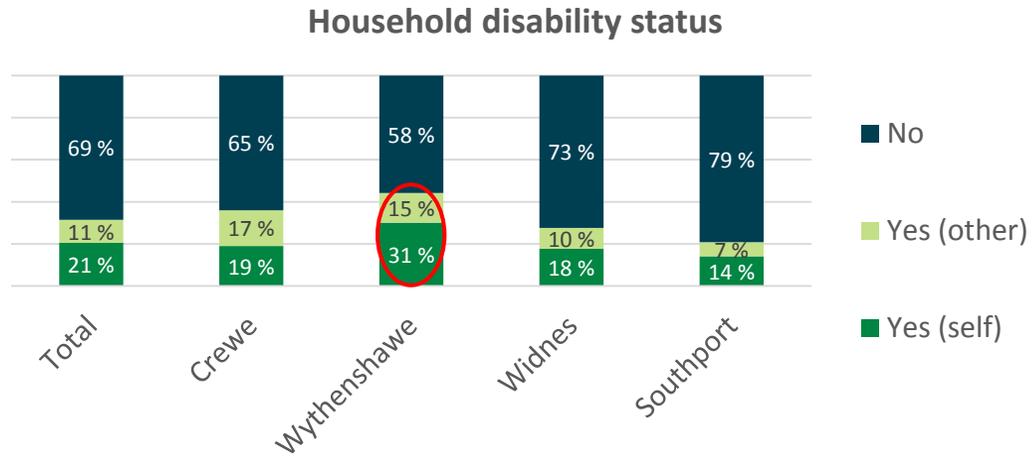
Base: 593. Crewe: 98, Wythenshawe: 150, Widnes: 196, Southport: 149

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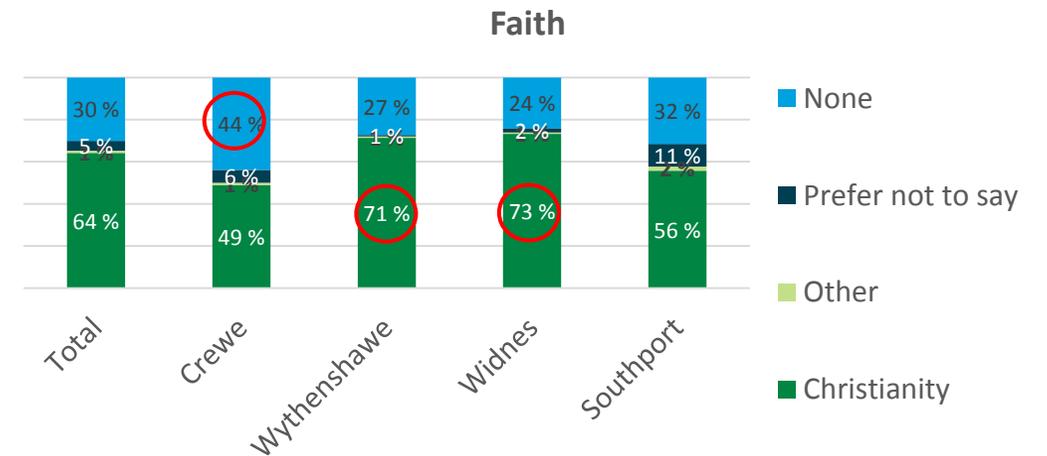
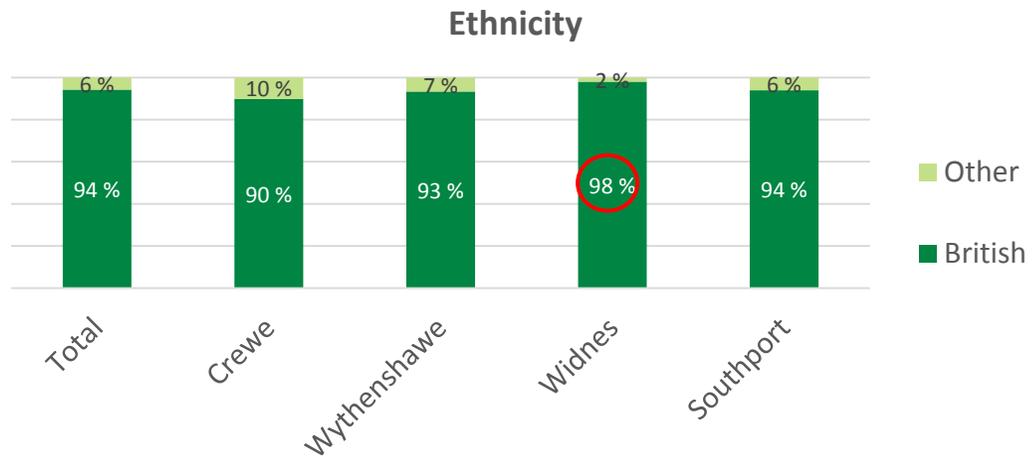
Significantly higher than the other locations

Sample 2

In total, just under a third of the sample had a disability in the household. This increased to 46% in Wythenshawe.



Base: 163. All who have/someone in household has a long term illness or disability



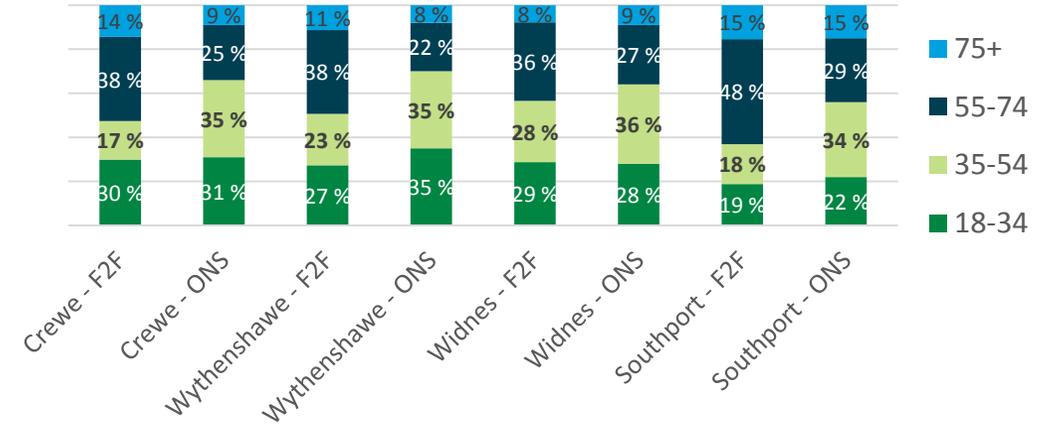
Base: 593. Crewe: 98, Wythenshawe: 150, Widnes: 196, Southport: 149

Our sample vs National statistics

Gender



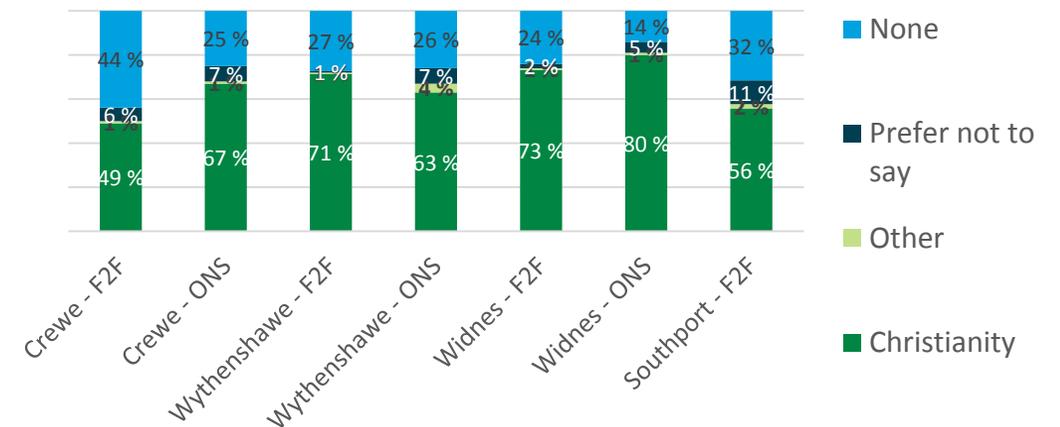
Age



Ethnicity



Faith



Base: 593. Crewe: 98, Wythenshawe: 150, Widnes: 196, Southport: 149 Stats have been pulled from 2011 ONS census

Executive Summary

Summary - Wythenshawe

Residents in Wythenshawe cared significantly more about where their supply is sourced from and if it is hard/soft; but despite currently being supplied the softest water, they were actually more accepting of the hardest Twort they tested.

Perceptions of current supply

Twort level 1

Satisfied with Overall quality

72%

Satisfied with Taste

63%

*Net Satisfied

Desire to know about water supplied

Claim to be aware of current supply source

16%

Important to know where water is sourced from

68%

Care whether home is supplied with hard/ soft water

61%

Desire to know about changes

Want to be notified about change in water supply

78%

Likely to contact United Utilities if notified of change

59%

How **concerned** would you be if United Utilities changed the source of the water

4.8/10

Mean

Summary - Crewe

The hall tests in Crewe revealed that residents marginally preferred their current supply (Twort 2) over the slightly softer Twort 1 and the harder Tworts 3 and 4. Acceptability was significantly lower for Twort 4.

Perceptions of current supply

Twort level 2

Satisfied with Overall quality

80%

Satisfied with Taste

68%

*Net Satisfied

Desire to know about water supplied

Claim to be aware of current supply source

20%

Important to know where water is sourced from

51%

Care whether home is supplied with hard/ soft water

43%

Desire to know about changes

Want to be notified about change in water supply

84%

Likely to contact United Utilities if notified of change

34%

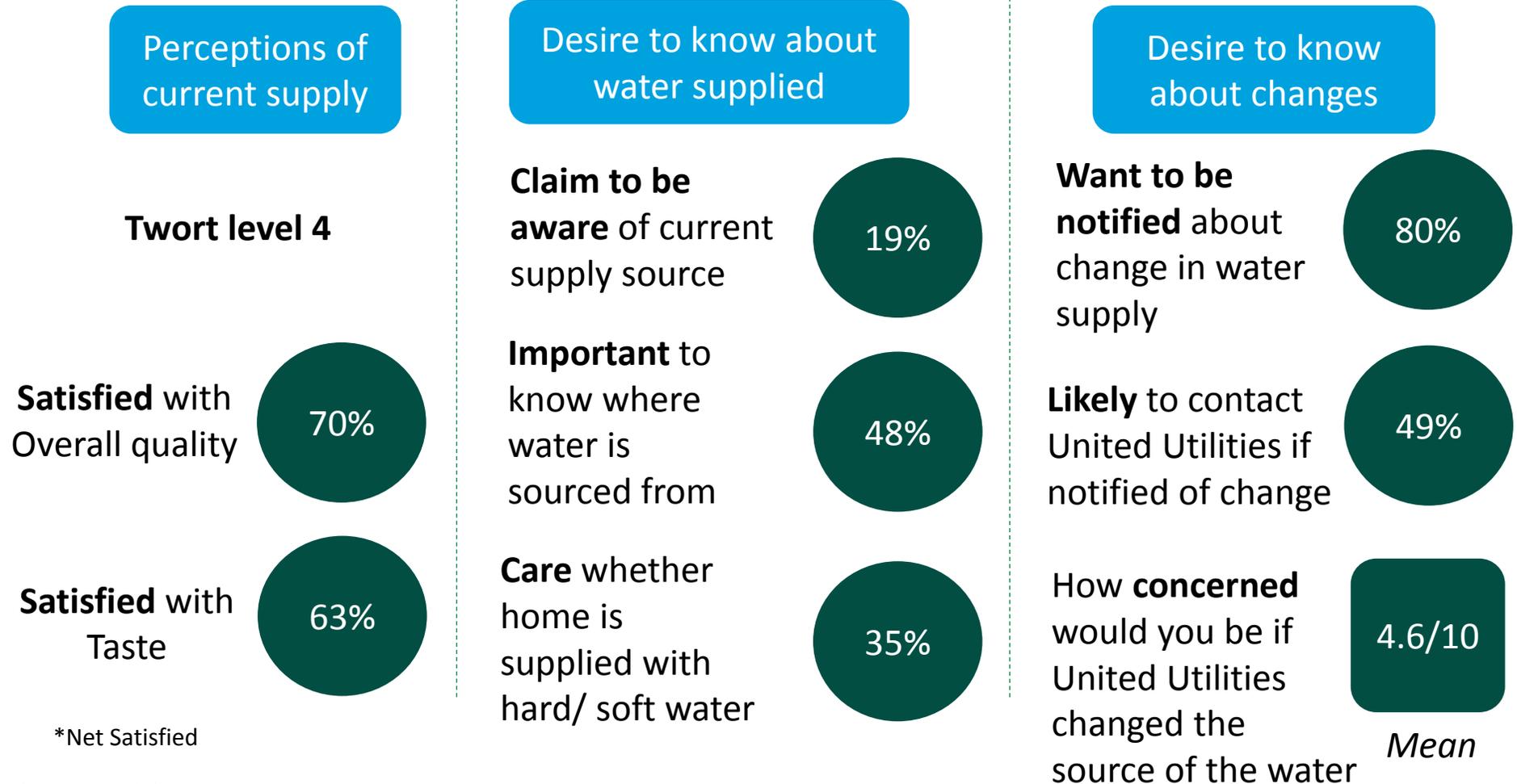
How **concerned** would you be if United Utilities changed the source of the water

4.8/10

Mean

Summary - Widnes

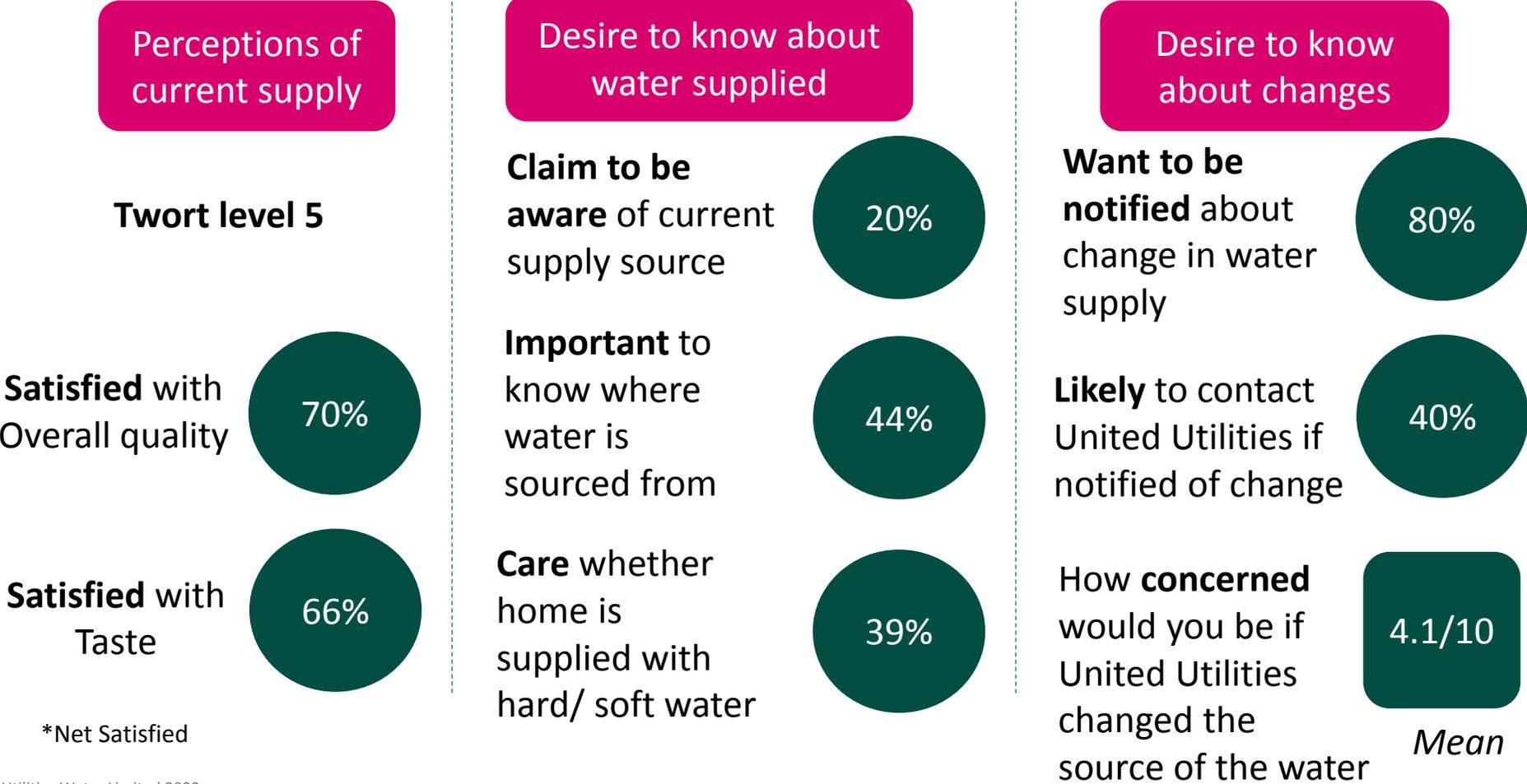
Residents in Widnes were as accepting of their current supply as they were of the softer Twort 2



*Net Satisfied

Summary - Southport

Despite having relatively hard water for their current supply, residents' perceptions of this were not that different from the other locations tested.



*Net Satisfied

Perceptions of current supply

Despite the varying Twort levels at each location, for the most part the same language was used to describe their water supply

There was no mention of the water being hard in Wythenshawe, but elsewhere the water was described as both hard and soft

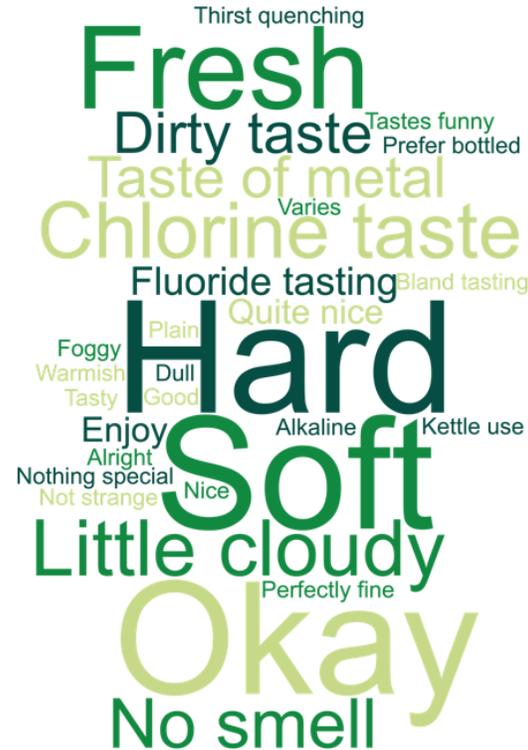
Wythenshawe: Twort 1



Crewe: Twort 2



Widnes: Twort 4



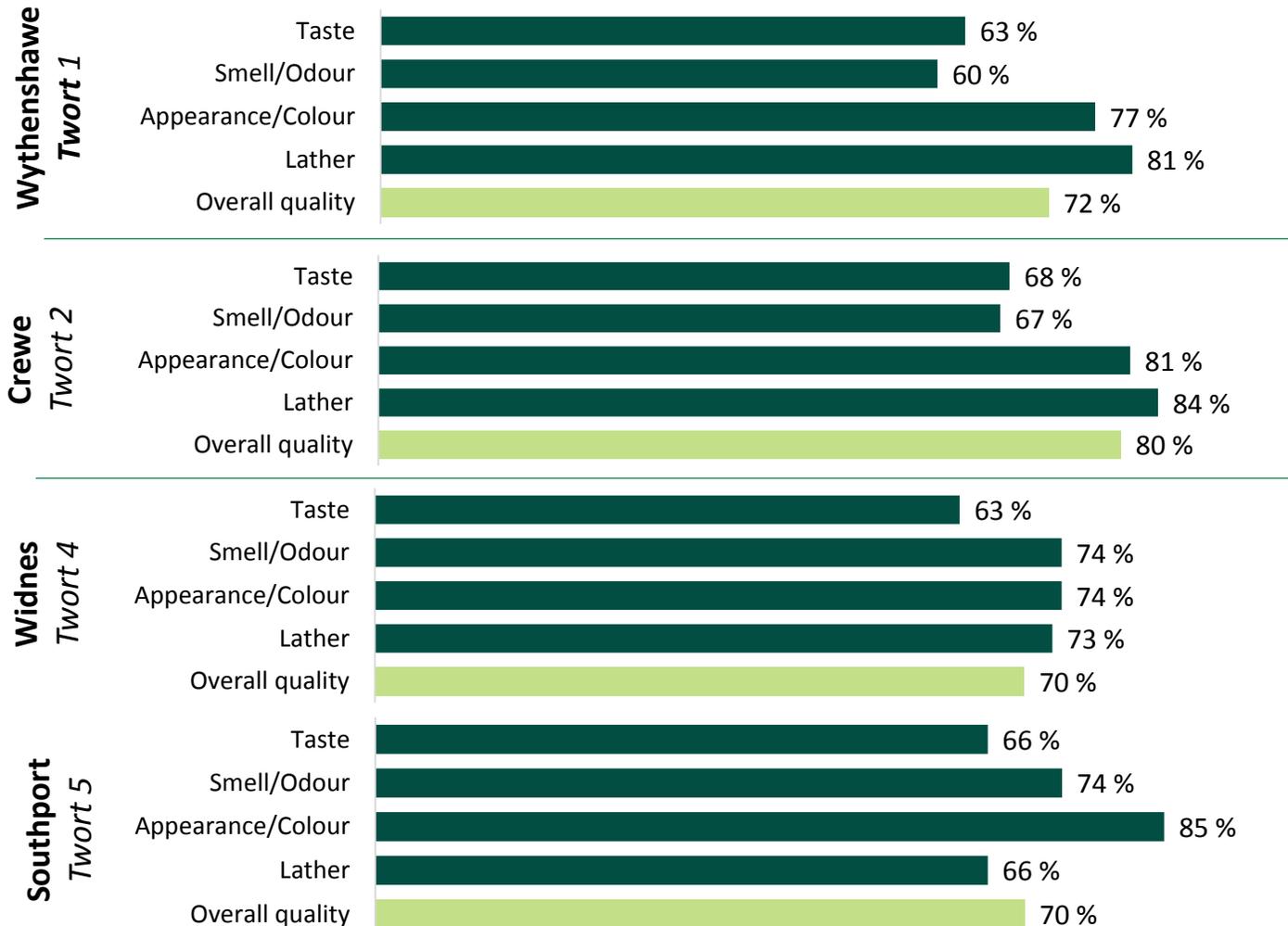
Southport: Twort 5



Q01. When thinking of the tap water supplied to your home, what words or phrases would you use to describe it?

Satisfaction with current supply

% satisfied with the following aspects of their water:



Between 63% and 68% were satisfied with the taste of the current supply in each location.

Residents in Crewe were marginally more positive about their current water supply across the metrics.

“I think there’s a good taste to it, it’s not tasting chemically, it’s quite clear and pure.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 2)

“Yeah, I agree I think it’s quite good quality, its not hard water.”

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 1)

Q02. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied, how satisfied would you say you are with the following aspects of your water: (base = 593. Crewe: 98, Wythenshawe: 150, Widnes: 196, Southport: 149)

Reasons for dissatisfaction

Only a small number of customers reported being dissatisfied...

22%

of customers were dissatisfied with the taste of their current supply.

"I contacted UU because for a short period of time my water tasted of chlorine."

Female, Wythenshawe

"I moved from Runcorn and I can taste a difference in the water here, it doesn't taste as pure."

Male, Widnes

11%

of customers were dissatisfied with the smell of their current supply.

"I have noticed since moving to Widnes that my washing smells of damp and I always think it's the water."

Female, Widnes

"Yeah, like I said a while back it had a bit of a strange smell and a little bit of a strange taste."

Male, Southport

10%

of customers were dissatisfied with the appearance of their current supply.

"Yeah, because there was a new estate down the road, for it must have been about 6 months there was a yellow tinge in the water, and I thought oh I'm not drinking it."

Male, Crewe

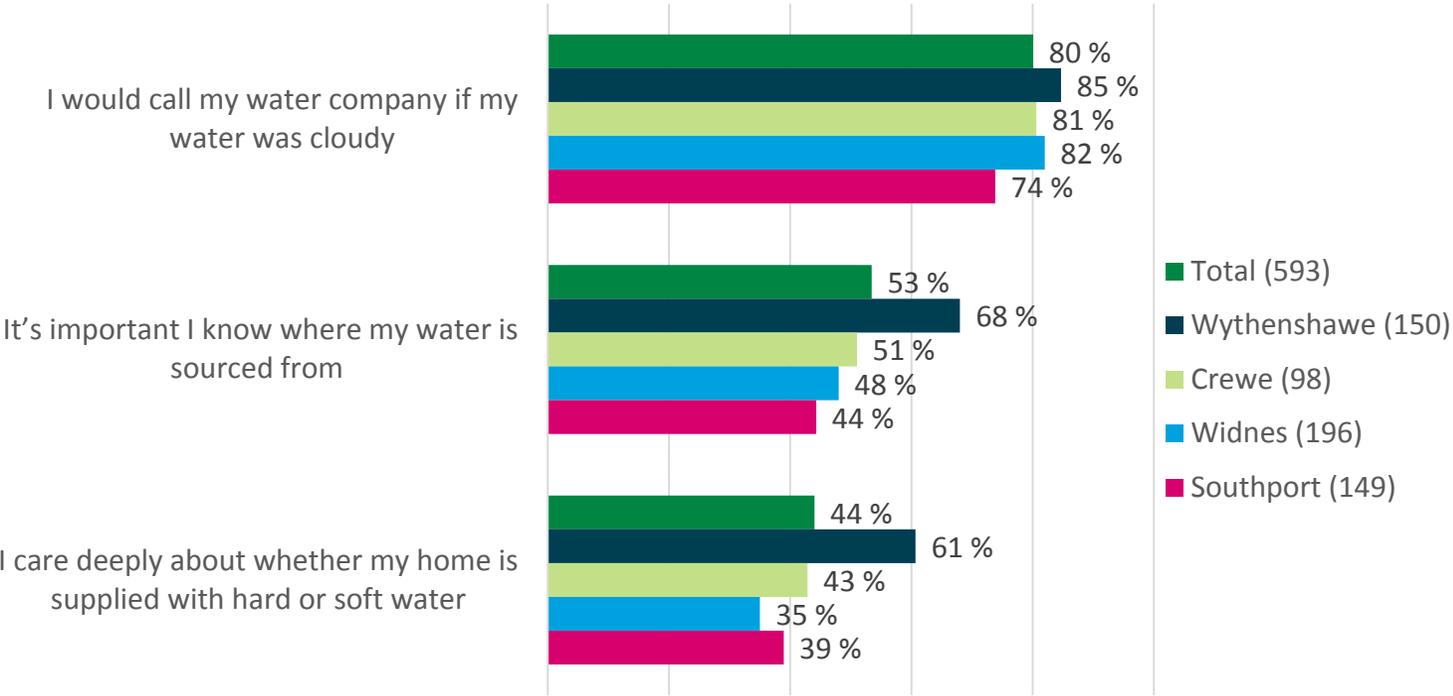
"I've had it where it coughed and spluttered then it gave out dirty water and then you run it for a minute, and it comes through clean.."

Male, Crewe

Q03. You said you were dissatisfied with AN ASPECT OF THE WATER Please can you explain why you are dissatisfied with these aspects?

The majority of customers say they would contact United Utilities if their water was cloudy – fewer are concerned by the other aspects of the supply

% agreeing with the following statements



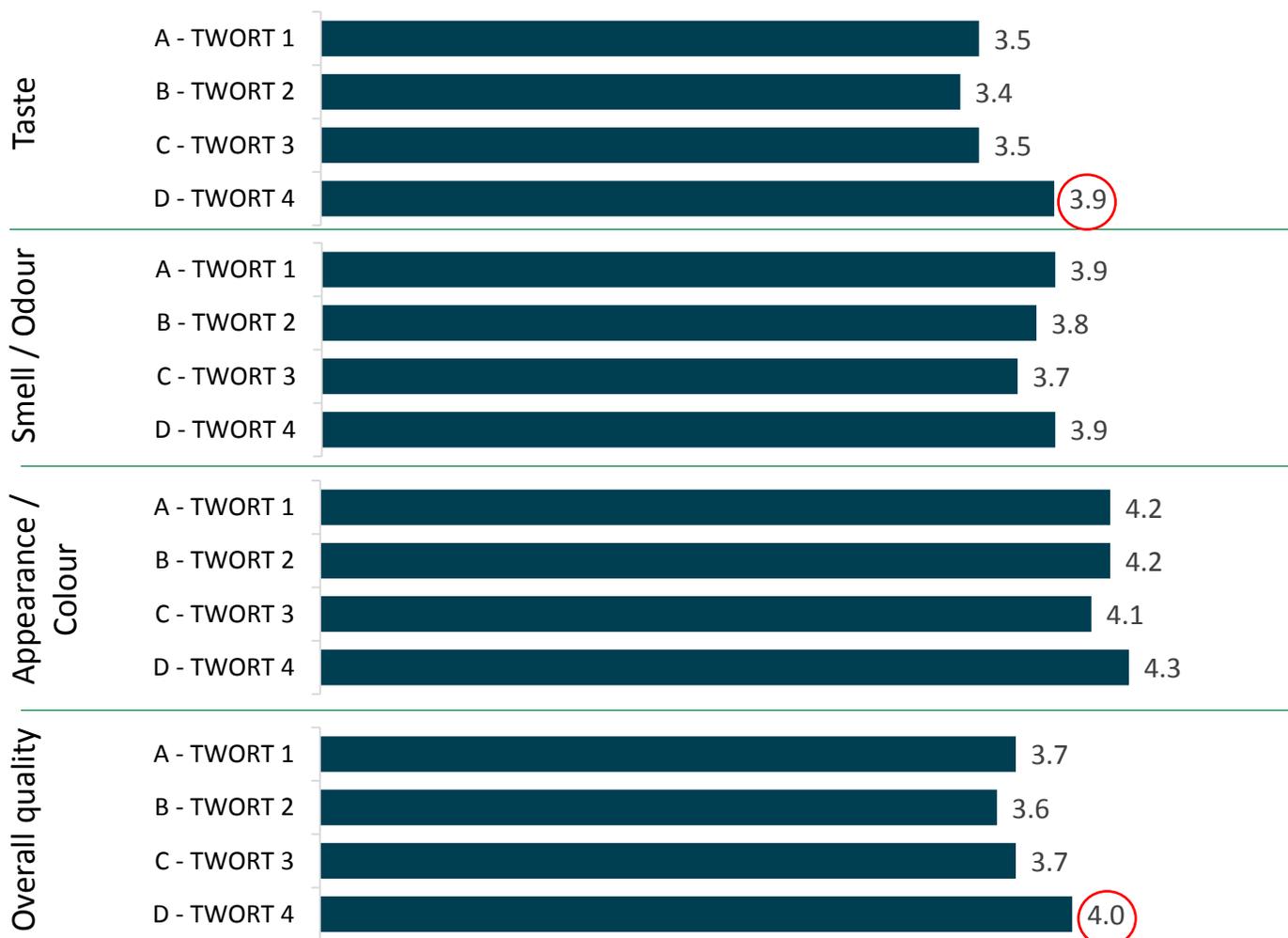
Customers living in Wythenshawe (currently supplied with softest water) are significantly more likely to say they care about where their water is sourced from and if it is hard or soft

Q4. And now thinking about the water supplied to your home, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. Base: see legend

Testing different Twort levels

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Wythenshawe – Current Supply (Twort 1)



Contrary to expectations, the hardest sample (Twort 4) was rated significantly more positively than the current supply (Twort 1) in terms of taste and overall quality.

“Yeah, I think it’s similar to C. clean, crisp erm pleasant. I’d say A is still the worst for me, just a lingering after taste, but it’s still acceptable.”

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 4)

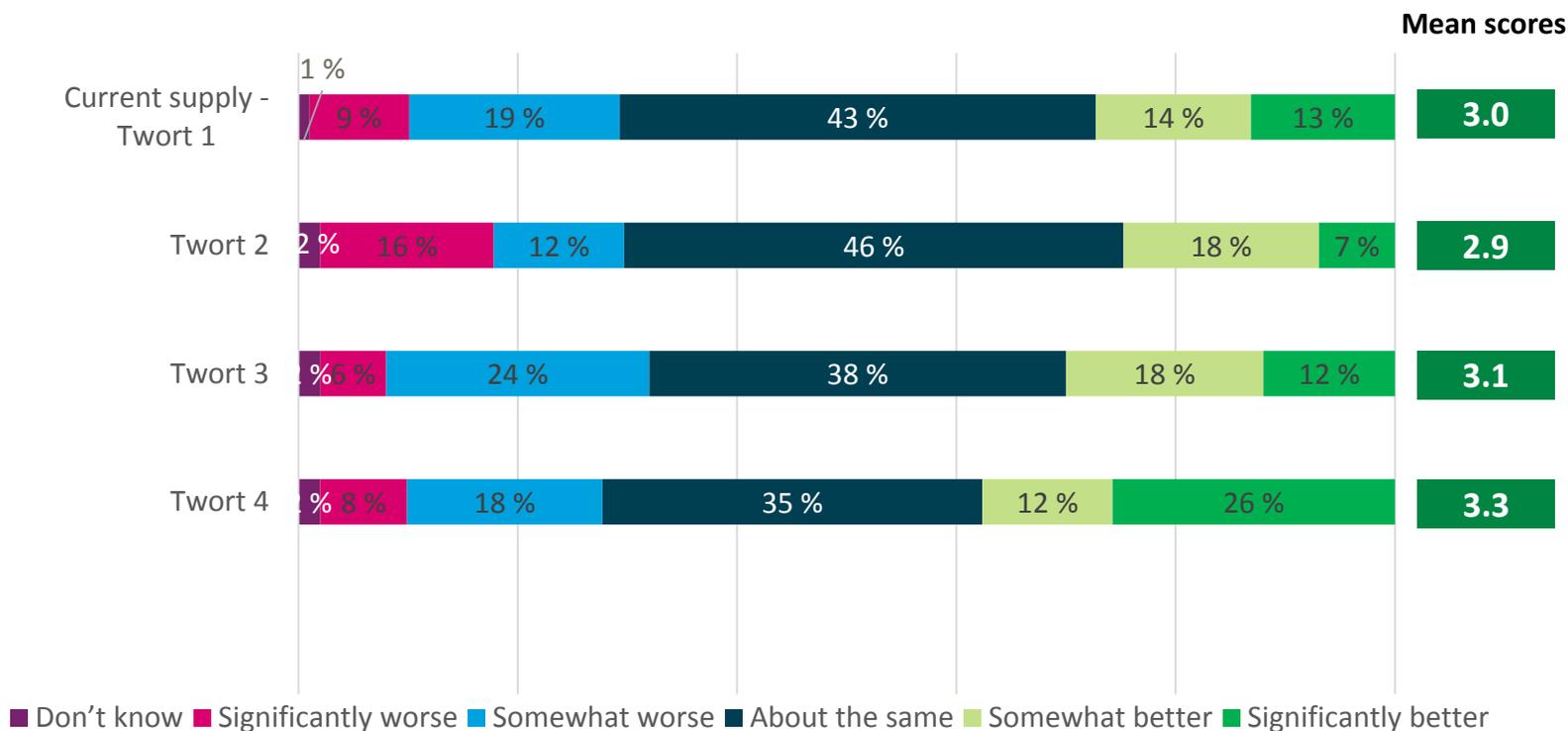
Q7. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good, how would you rate the following aspects of this water. A Base: 150, B Base: 90, C Base: 109, D Base: 101

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Wythenshawe - Current Supply (Twort 1)

How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it..

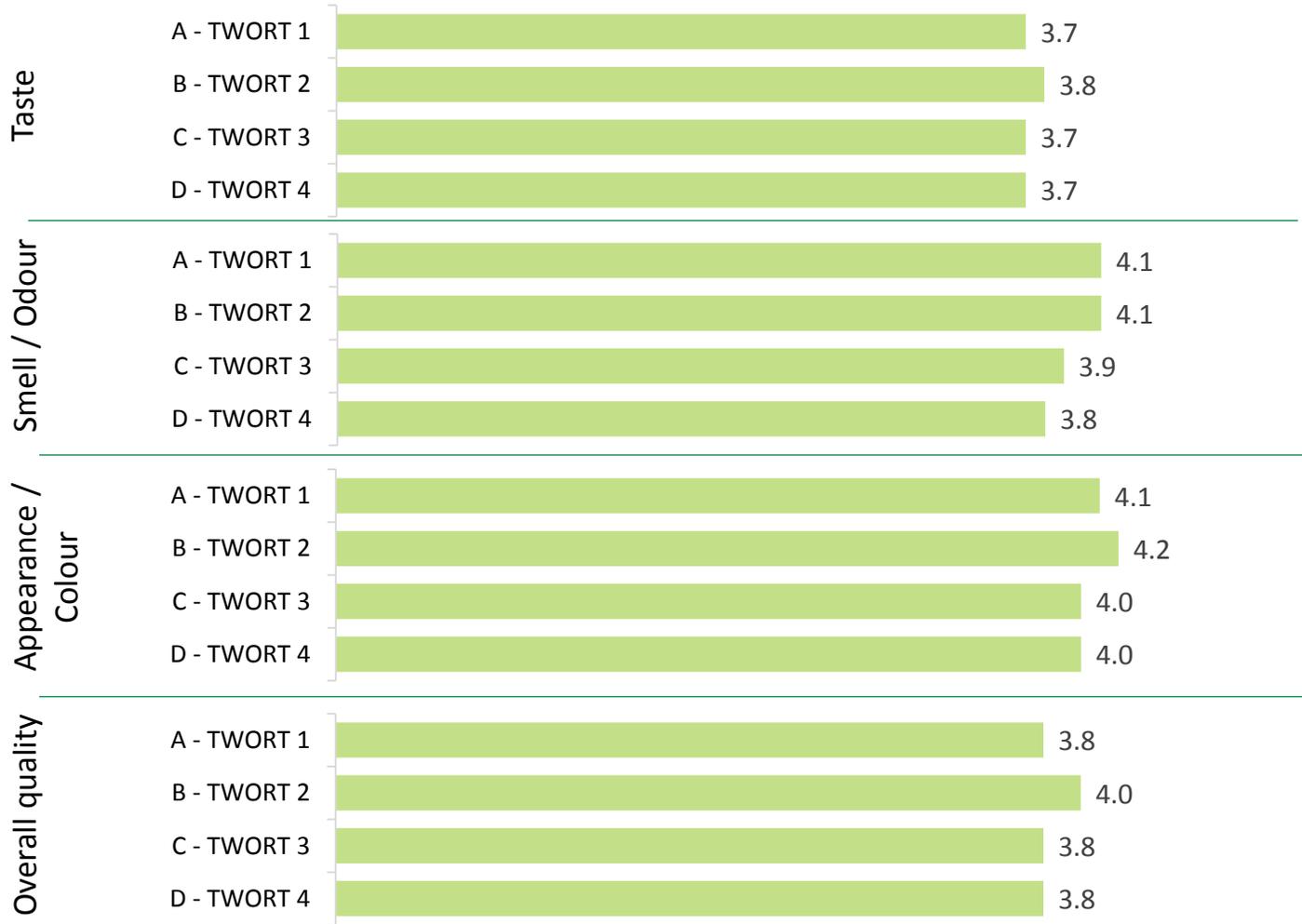
Twort 2 was most comparable to their home supply and a higher proportion felt that Twort 4 was better than their home supply.



Q8. How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it... A Base: 62, B Base: 98, C Base: 98, D Base: 36

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Crewe – Current Supply (Twort 2)



Whilst there is little variation across the rating of these metrics, Crewe’s current sample marginally performs the best. However, this difference is not statistically significant.

“I liked it; It looks like the water that comes out of my tap at home.”
Female, Crewe (Twort B)

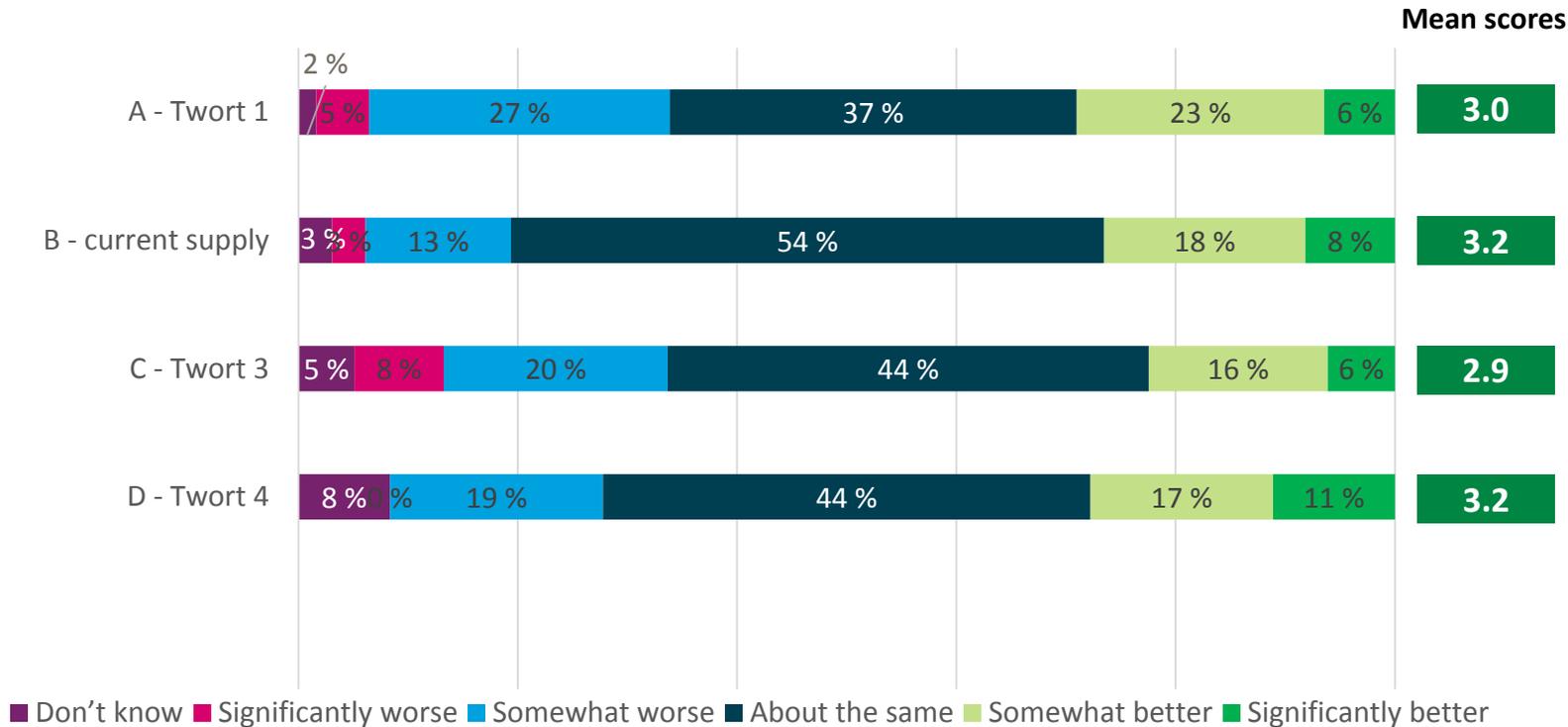
“Yeah, it’s about the same as home really, I’d be happy if that came out my tap.”
Female, Crewe (Twort B)

Q7. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good, how would you rate the following aspects of this water. A Base: 62, B Base: 98, C Base: 98, D Base: 36

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Crewe – Current Supply (Twort 2)

How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it..

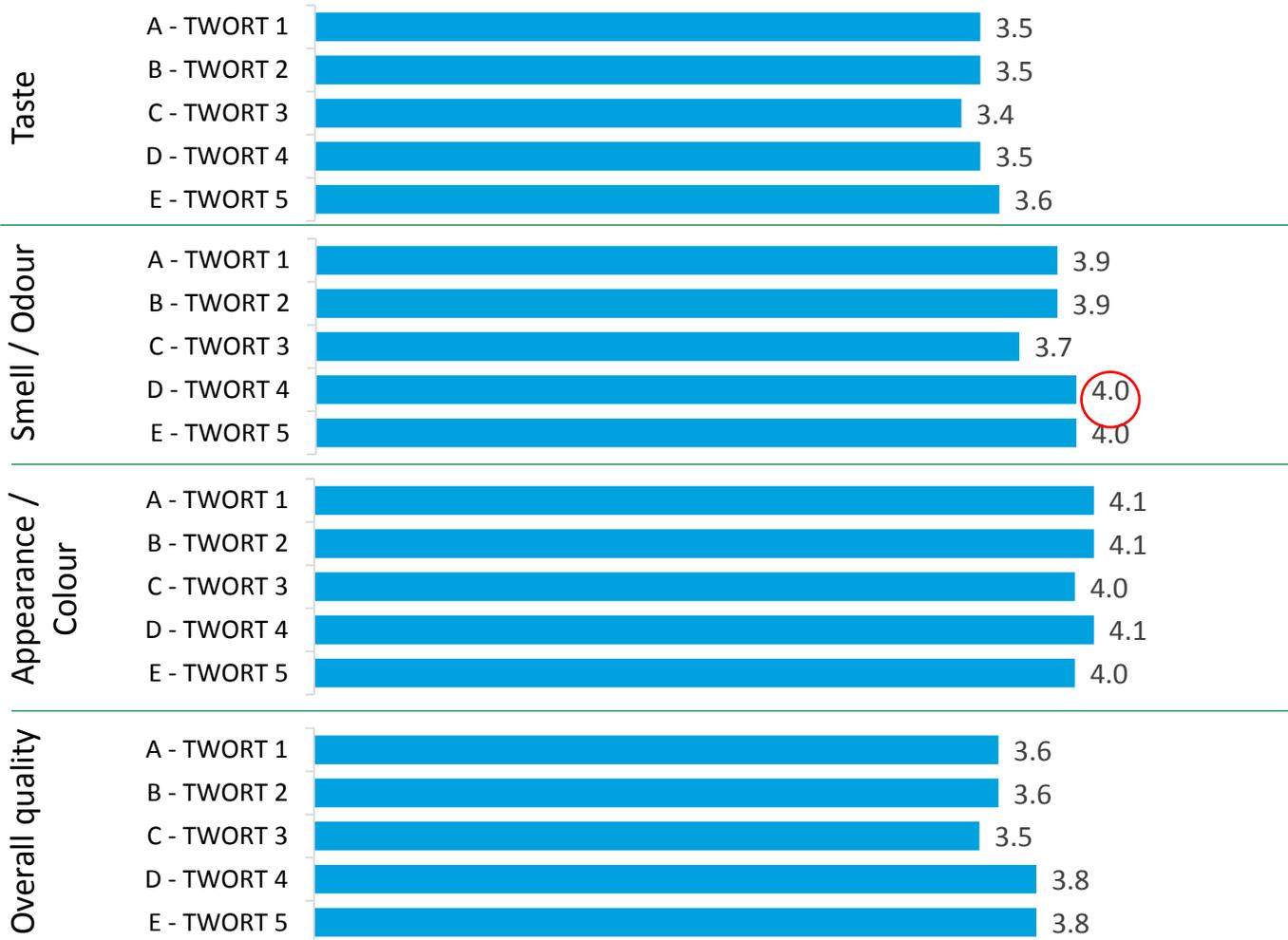


Over half of the residents in Crewe when testing their current supply blind, rated it as similar to their supply at home.

Q8. How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it... A Base: 62, B Base: 98, C Base: 98, D Base: 36

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Widnes – Current supply (Twort 4)



Across the metrics no Twort performed notably better than others. The harder samples performed just as well as Widnes' current sample and the softer sample tested.

"I think they all tasted ok; I'd drink them all. The first one to me tasted more like bottled water, but it makes no difference to me."

Female, Widnes

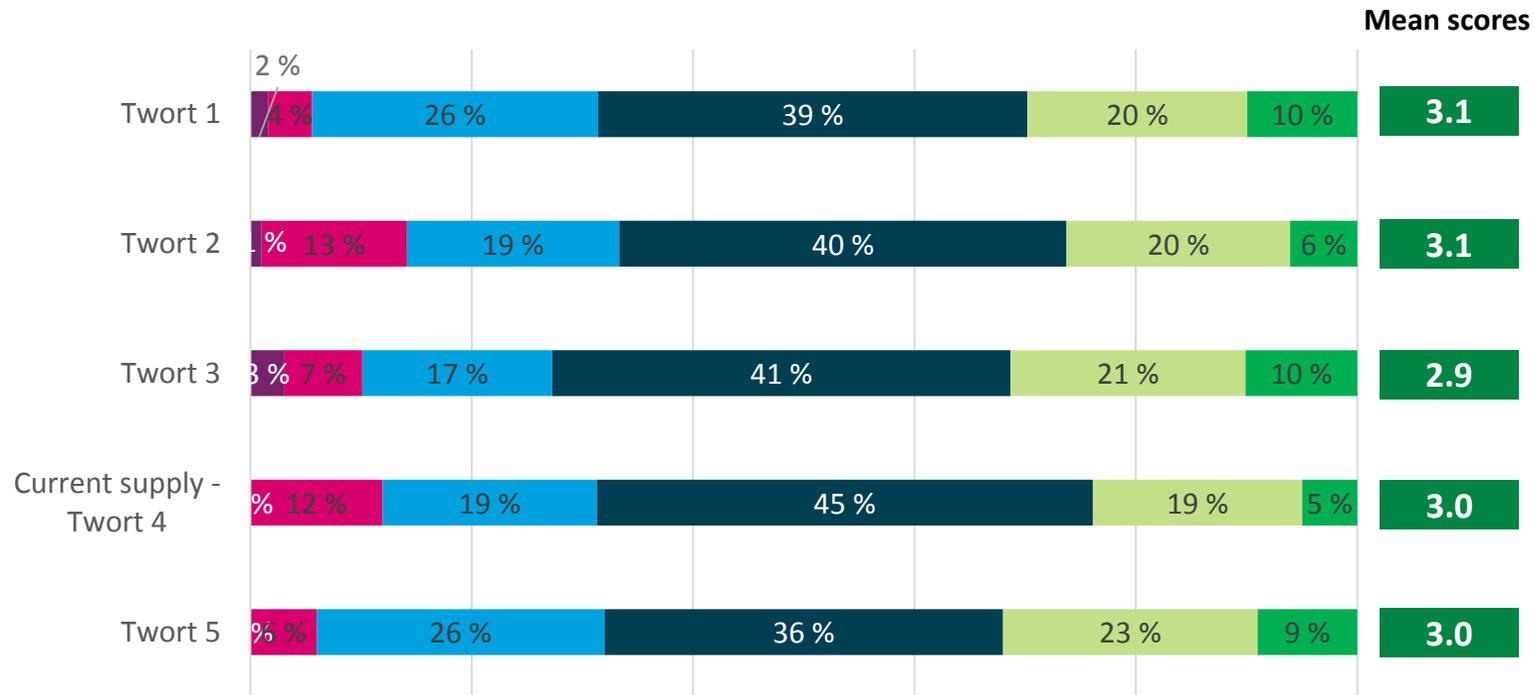
Q7. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good, how would you rate the following aspects of this water. A Base 101; , B Base:196, C Base: 99, D Base: 95 E Base: 47

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Widnes – Current supply (Twort 4)

How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it..

Again, when comparing how customers rated each Twort compared to their water at home, there was no real stand out.

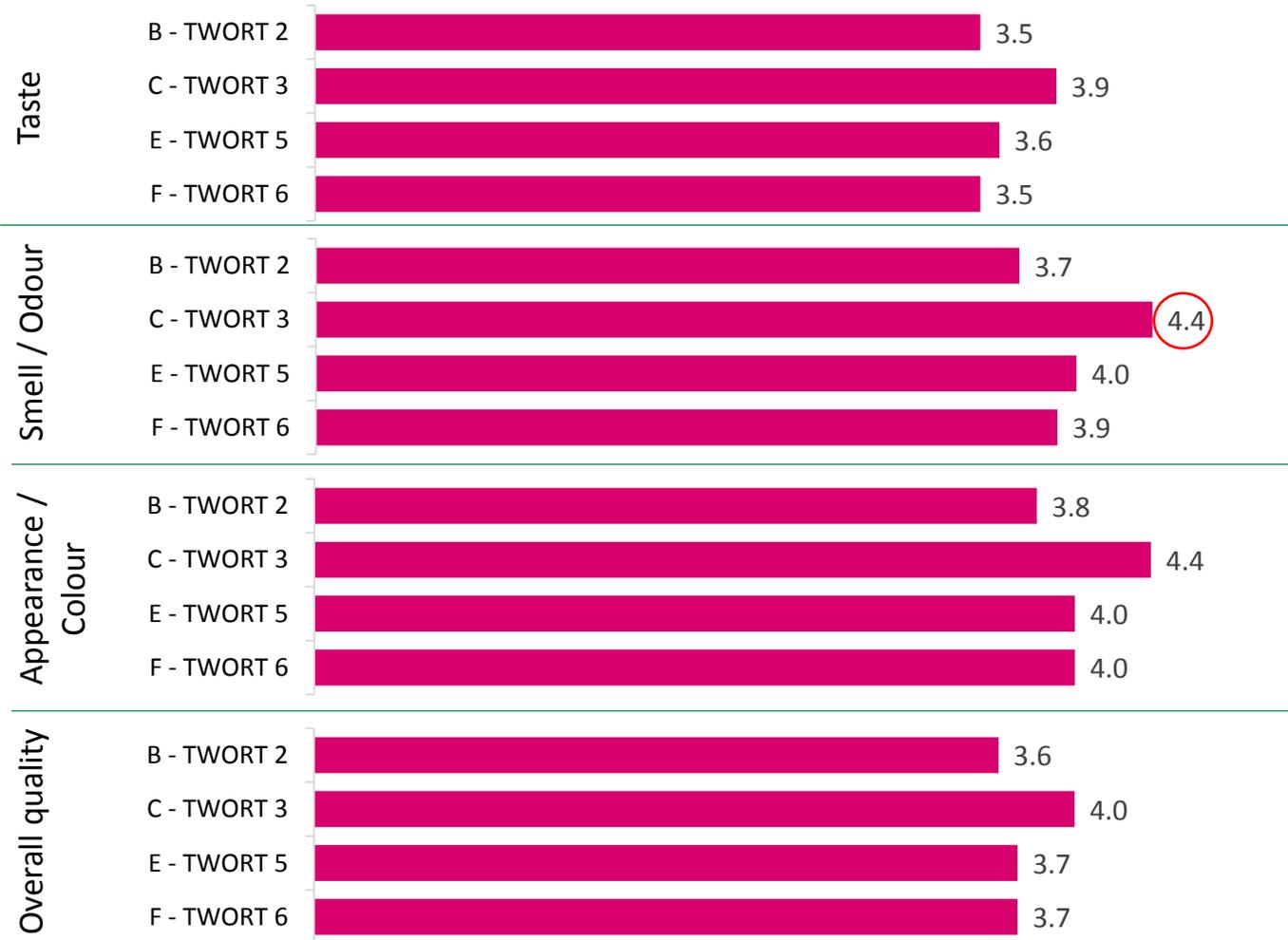


■ Don't know ■ Significantly worse ■ Somewhat worse ■ About the same ■ Somewhat better ■ Significantly better

Q8. How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it... A Base:101, B Base:196, C Base: 99, D Base: 95 E Base: 47

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Southport – Current supply (Twort 5)



Customers in Southport rated Twort 3 most favourably for all categories, whilst Twort 2 received the lowest ratings in each category

“It didn’t seem to have as many chemicals in that and there was no sort of chemically taste to it.”

Female, Southport (Twort 3)

“I didn’t like that because to me it wasn’t clear it was like a funny taste.”

Female, Southport (Twort 2)

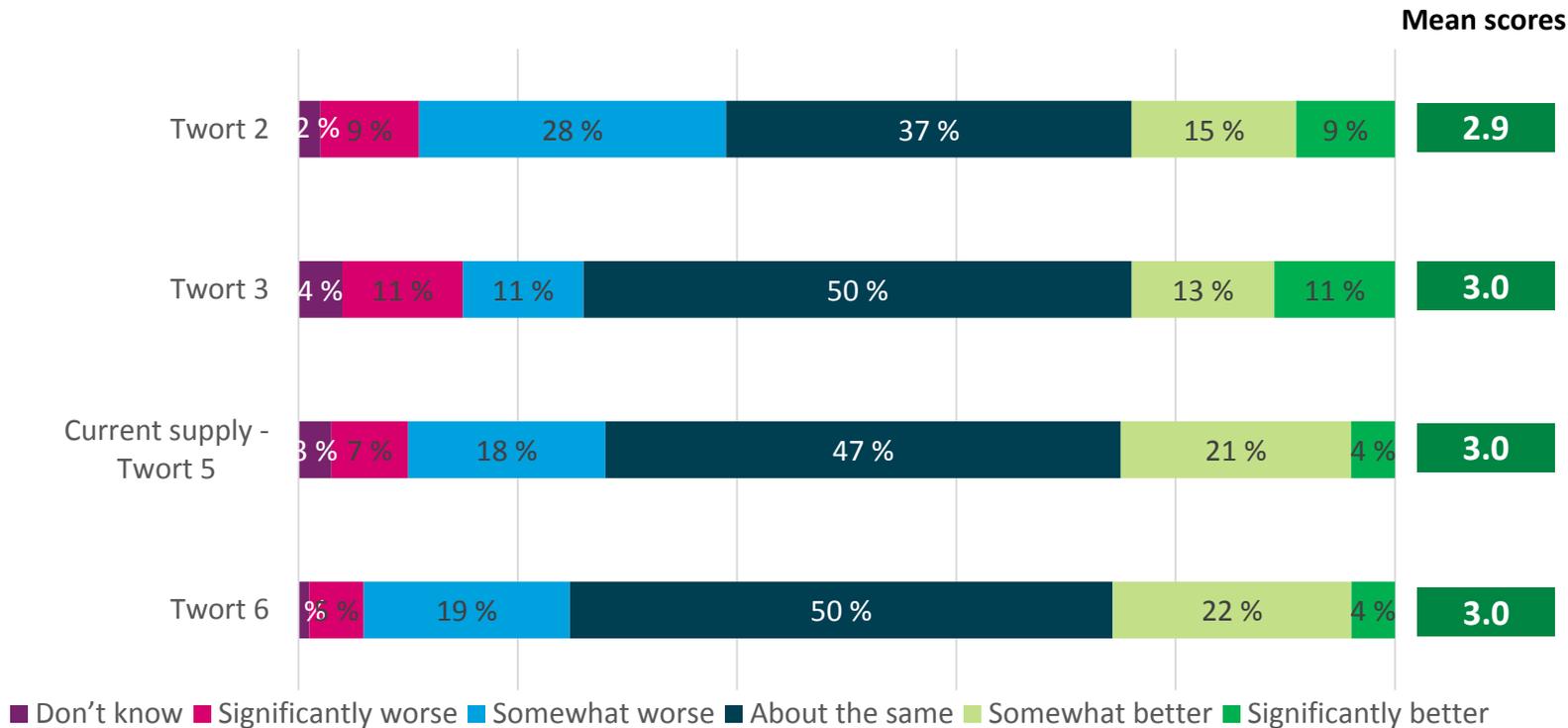
Q7. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very poor and 5 is very good, how would you rate the following aspects of this water. B Base: 54, C Base: 46, E Base: 149, F Base: 149

PERCEPTIONS OF TWORT LEVELS

Southport – Current supply (Twort 5)

How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it..

Across all the different Twort levels tested, in terms of how they measure up to the current supply there are no notable differences.



Q8. How would you rate this water overall compared to the water that is supplied to your home, in terms of its taste, odour and appearance? Is it... B Base: 54, C Base: 46, E Base: 149, F Base: 149

Very few customers noticed any differences in the boiling of different Twort levels...

Did you notice anything different about the sound of the kettle as it was boiling? If so, what?

Customers frequently reported that they **noticed no differences** in terms of the **sounds they heard** between the boiling of the different Twort levels.

“No, just sounds like a kettle boiling. No different to at home.”

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 1)

“No, but I never sit and listen to my kettle boil.”

Female, Southport (Twort 2)

The most common aspect customers commented on was the **volume of the kettle boiling** being **louder or quieter**.

“That one sounded louder.”

Female, Southport (Twort 5)

“I thought that one sounded a bit quieter.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 4)

Only a **small number of customers** thought that the **hardness of the water** could be having an **impact upon how the kettle boiled**.

“It sounded like the kettle was working a bit harder, like it was harder water.”

Male, Crewe (Twort 3)

“That one seemed to bubble more as though it was different water.”

Female, Southport (Twort 6)

But there were noticeable differences in the colour of customers' brews...

The most common responses from customers related to the **colour of the different cups of tea** and the **presence of scum**, with higher Twort levels producing darker brews and scum.

"Yeah, it's a lot darker than A and B and you can see the difference between them because I haven't put milk in mine."

Female, Crewe (Twort 3)

"There's like a scum on this one and someone said maybe it's the milk, but I haven't got any milk in mine and it's still there."

Female, Southport (Twort 5)

Despite **some differences in colour**, customers largely felt that all the samples were **acceptable**.

"See I don't mind either of those once I put milk in it, either colour is fine for me."

Male, Wythenshawe

"It looks a bit different, but I wouldn't sit there inspecting it at home I'd just drink it."

Male, Widnes

Customers present at the focus group were reminded that certain factors were beyond our control e.g., brand of tea / coffee, milk used etc.



Despite taste not being the main focus, some did notice a dulling of flavours with harder water samples

Common responses related to the actual **taste of the tea**, with customers stating that they **couldn't taste the tea or sugar with higher Tworts**.

"I agree, you can't taste the tea in this one like you can in A and C."

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 4)

"I've made them all exactly the same, but I'm actually struggling with F to get the taste of the sugar. It's like there's no sugar in it."

Male, Southport (Twort 6)

"I feel like I can taste the coffee more in this one and I'm getting a nicer smell of coffee than with the others."

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 3)

Overall, despite **some differences in taste**, customers largely felt that all the samples were **acceptable**.

"I don't think so if I'm honest, by the time I've put tea or coffee in and milk in it, there wasn't that huge, massive difference."

Male, Southport

"I don't think it matters as much when it's a hot drink because you're not tasting pure water, you're tasting the tea or coffee."

Female, Widnes

"I'd be happy with all three of them, you make it that quick I wouldn't even notice."

Male, Southport

Customers present at the focus group were reminded that certain factors were beyond our control e.g., brand of tea / coffee, milk used etc.

Differences were reported when washing with different water samples...

Average scores (out of 5) for overall quality at each location:

	Twort 1	Twort 2	Twort 3	Twort 4	Twort 5	Twort 6
Wythenshawe	3.8	2.5	3.5	4	-	-
Crewe	4.7	4.1	3.5	3	-	-
Widnes	-	4	-	4	4	
Southport	-	3	4	-	3.7	3.8

Despite little variation in respondents' ratings, differences became apparent through discussion.

"My hands feel lovely and really soft."

Female, Crewe (Twort 1)

"I gave it 5 right across because I thought that it was really soft and beautifully lathered."

Female, Southport (Twort 3)

Differences were also reported when washing with different water samples, with many feeling harder water samples felt greasy on the skin...

“It’s definitely more foamy than B, I scored it a 4 for the lather, but it didn’t feel quite as good on the skin the as first one.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 3)

“I’ve gave it a 4, it felt latherier, but I don’t feel so nice afterwards like the first one.”

Female, Southport (Twort 6)

“My hands are usually softer at home. This is quite thick, quite clammy for C. B was quite soft and nice on the skin.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 3)

“It doesn’t come off very well and my hands feel a bit greasy afterwards.”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 3)

“The lather is really nice, but my hands do feel a bit sticky afterwards.”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 4)

“It lathered up well, but it felt like it needed more rinsing to get the soap off.”

Male, Southport (Twort 6)

“My hands feel sticky. If I was at home, I’d probably run my hands under water again, but it did lather up nicely and it felt fine while washing my hands, but afterwards it feels sticky.”

Male, Southport (Twort 6)

“My hands feel dryer afterwards. There was a nice lather, but afterwards it’s now feeling a bit dry.”

Male, Southport (Twort 5)

“It’s not quite as nice feel on my hands, they don’t feel as clean. It lathered up well but feeling afterwards has gone from a 5 to a 4.”

Male, Southport (Twort 5)

Customers present at the focus groups were reminded that certain factors were beyond our control e.g., temperature of the water, using a bowl rather than a sink, type of soap etc.

Whilst softer samples felt nicer on the skin...

“The water was quite soft on the skin, so I gave it a 4 for touch on the skin and then a 5 for how my skin feels afterwards, the water has made my hands feels soft actually.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 2)

“I gave that a 4 for touch on the skin, I thought it was nice like it just runs off.”

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 1)

“Yeah, my hands feel really soft, I like that one.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 1)

“My hands feel soft.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 1)

“I gave that one 5’s across the board, my hands feel really soft.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 2)

“I gave 5 for touch on skin and 3 for lather and 5 for the after feeling.”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 1)

“That one was lovely, and my hands feel soft, but I didn’t get much foam.”

Male, Widnes (Twort 2)

“Yeah, my hands feel nice and clean and soft to touch.”

Male, Crewe (Twort 2)

“My hands feel smooth, but I don’t think that one lathered the same way.”

Male, Widnes (Twort 2)

Customers present at the focus group were reminded that certain factors were beyond our control e.g., temperature of the water, using a bowl rather than a sink, type of soap etc.

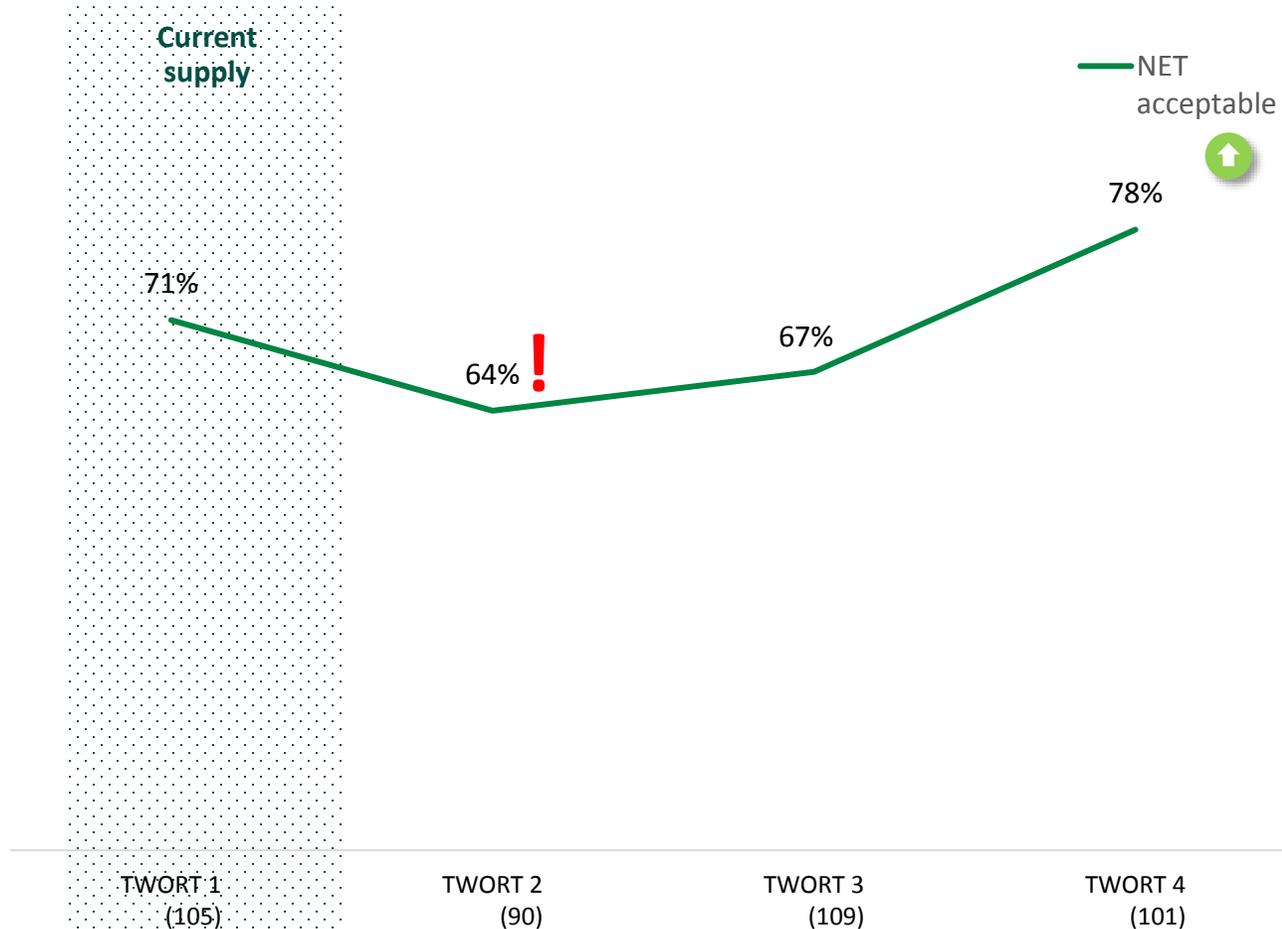
Acceptability of different Twort levels

Wythenshawe – Acceptability

Wythenshawe

Hall tests

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?



Satisfaction with taste of current water supply: **63% Satisfied**

Wythenshawe residents preferred Twort level 4 over their current supply but interestingly were more negative about the samples in between their current supply and Twort 4.

Nevertheless, no Twort was deemed to be significantly worse than their current supply which indicates alternative supplies are likely to be accepted by the majority.

“It tasted clean, crisp and pleasant.”

Wythenshawe (Twort 4)



Significantly higher than acceptability of Twort 2

Q09. for this sample, how acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water? (base = see chart)

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Wythenshawe – Acceptability

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?

Customers in Wythenshawe felt **Twort 1** tasted **refreshing** and overall feedback was **positive** for this level.

“It was refreshing, it didn’t have any additional taste to it. It just tasted quite nice.”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 1)

“I gave 5 for touch on skin and 3 for foaminess and 5 for the after feeling.”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 1)

Twort 2 received **less favorable feedback** with customers in Wythenshawe claiming it had a slight **aftertaste**.

“It’s got a bit of an aftertaste; water shouldn’t taste of anything; It should leave you refreshed.”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 2)

“There seems to be a weird bit of an aftertaste”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 2)

Customers in Wythenshawe had **mixed views** on **Twort 3** with some finding it **acceptable** but others **disliking the taste**.

“Yeah, if that was coming through the tap, I’d still be happy with it.”

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 3)

“It tastes different than the first one. I think it tastes worse.”

Female, Wythenshawe (Twort 3)

Twort 4 also received **positive feedback** from customers in Wythenshawe and those who did notice differences still felt this was **acceptable**.

“Yeah, I think that is similar to C, clean, crisp and pleasant.”

Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 4)

“See I don’t mind either of those once I put milk in it, either colour is fine for me.”

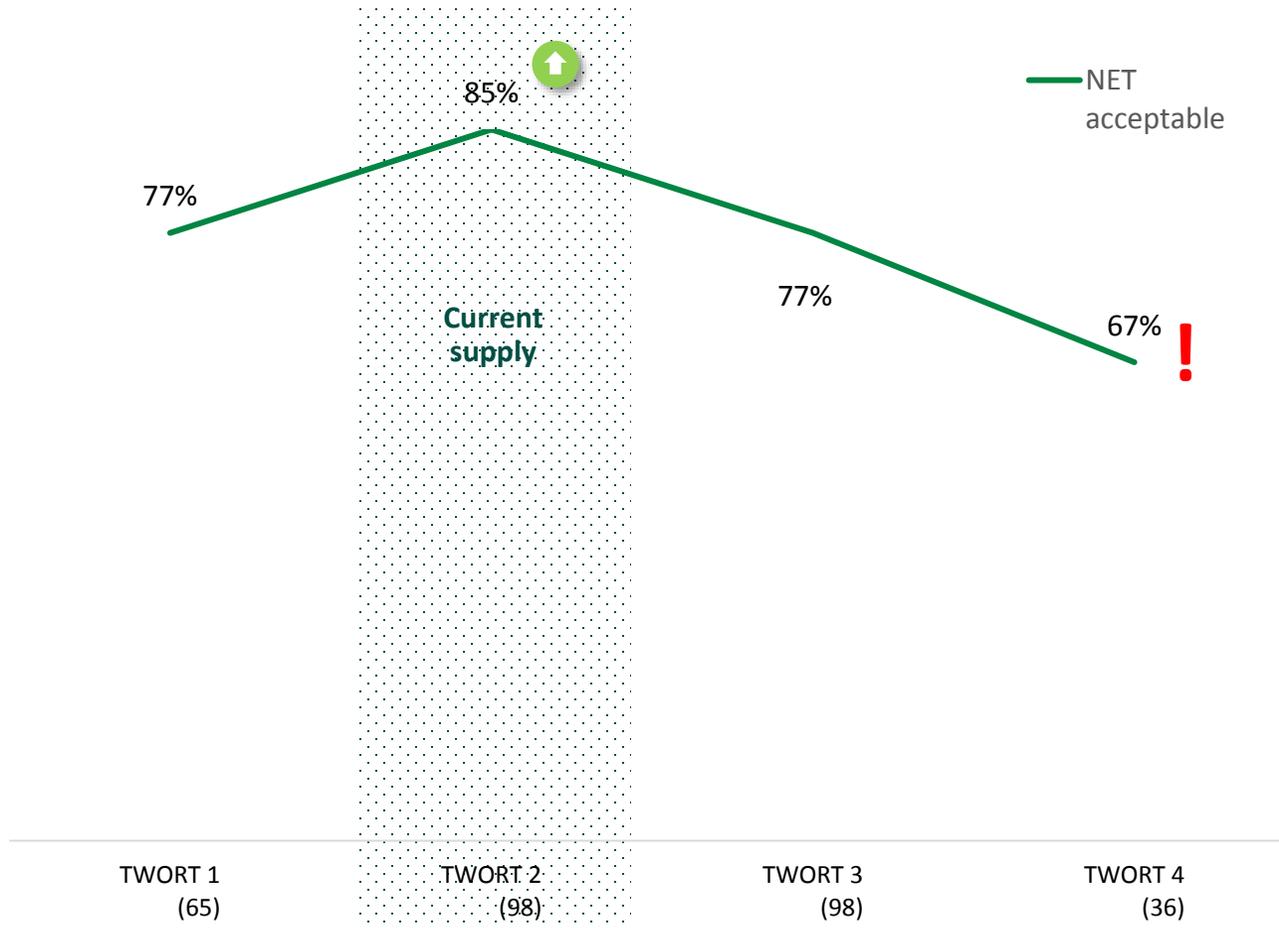
Male, Wythenshawe (Twort 4)

Crewe – Acceptability

Crewe

Hall tests

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?



Satisfaction with taste of current water supply: **68% Satisfied**

The current water supply in Crewe was the most accepted; even ahead of the softer sample tested.

This could indicate that people might only be able to pick up on a real difference once the quality of the water shifts more dramatically from their current sample.

Twort 4 was significantly less acceptable than Twort 2.

“I put 4 all the way across; Yeah, it’s clear water.”
Crewe (Twort 2)

↑ Significantly higher than acceptability of Twort 4

Q09. for this sample, how acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water? (base = see chart)

Crewe – Acceptability

Crewe

Focus Groups

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?

Customers in Crewe felt **Twort 1** tasted **neutral** and overall feedback was **positive** for this level.

“I think it was pretty neutral really, not much taste to it, it was fine.”

Male, Crewe (Twort 1)

“I quite liked it; I could quite easily have more.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 1)

Twort 2 was correctly identified by customers in Crewe as the water that they **typically get** and again feedback was **positive** for this level.

“I liked it; It looks like the water that comes out of my tap.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 2)

“I put 4 all the way across; Yeah, it’s clear water.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 2)

Customers in Crewe could taste a **difference** with **Twort 3** but still felt this level was **acceptable**.

“I don’t think I’d kick up a fuss about water, I’d probably just run the tap a bit longer if it tasted like that.”

Female, Crewe (Twort 3)

“I’ve never studied my own water that much. I think that’s sound, it’s just as good as home.”

Male, Crewe (Twort 3)

Again, a **difference in taste** was detected with **Twort 4** but customers in Crewe still felt this level was **acceptable**.

“Yeah, you can taste a littler difference between them, but they’re all clear enough.”

Male, Crewe (Twort 4)

“I wouldn’t complain if it came through my tap.”

Male, Crewe (Twort 4)

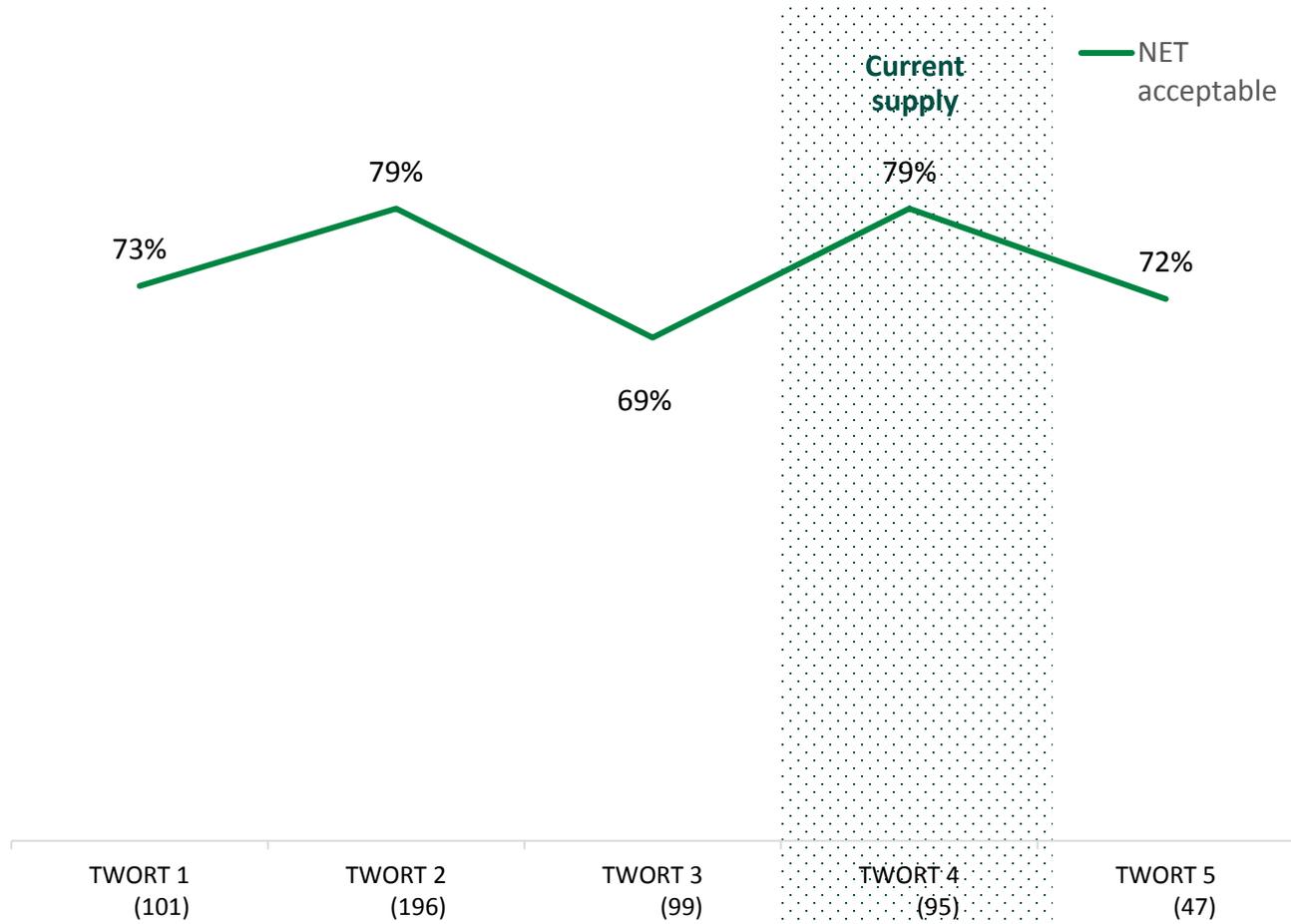
Q09b. for this sample, how acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?

Widnes – Acceptability

Widnes

Hall tests

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?



Satisfaction with taste of current water supply: **63% Satisfied**

Widnes residents were most accepting of their current supply but were equally accepting of Twort 2.

Even though Twort 3 was less acceptable than 2 and 4, this is not statistically significant.

Again no Twort was deemed to be significantly worse than their current supply.

“B does taste more refreshing like it’s bottled water, but I wouldn’t phone up and complain over this one.”
Female, Widnes (Twort 5)

Q09. for this sample, how acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water? (base = see chart)

Widnes – Acceptability

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?

Customers in Widnes felt **Twort 2** tasted **better than their normal supply**, leaving them with the impression it was **bottled water**.

“I think that tastes similar to distilled water, like bottled water.”

Female, Widnes (Twort 2)

“That tastes better than my tap water, maybe it’s bottled or just not from Widnes.”

Female, Widnes (Twort 2)

Customers in Widnes were less keen on **Twort 3**, with some claiming it **didn’t taste as fresh** as other samples.

“I mean it’s not dirty looking at it, but it just doesn’t taste as fresh, there’s just something about it.”

Male, Widnes (Twort 3)

“It’s like it’s been sitting out for a wee while, like and it’s just not as fresh.”

Female, Widnes (Twort 3)

Twort 4 (their current supply) was perceived as being **more like tap water** and some commented that it **tasted of chalk** but overall, this sample was **accepted**.

“It’s going to sound weird, but I think it tastes a bit chalky, like there’s something in it.”

Male, Widnes (Twort 4)

“I thought that one tasted more like tap water than the others but its acceptable.”

Female, Widnes (Twort 4)

Customers found this sample **acceptable**.

“I can’t really tell the difference if I’m honest, maybe B tasted more like bottled water, but this is fine.”

Female, Widnes (Twort 5)

“I think it tasted fine; I wouldn’t complain about that.”

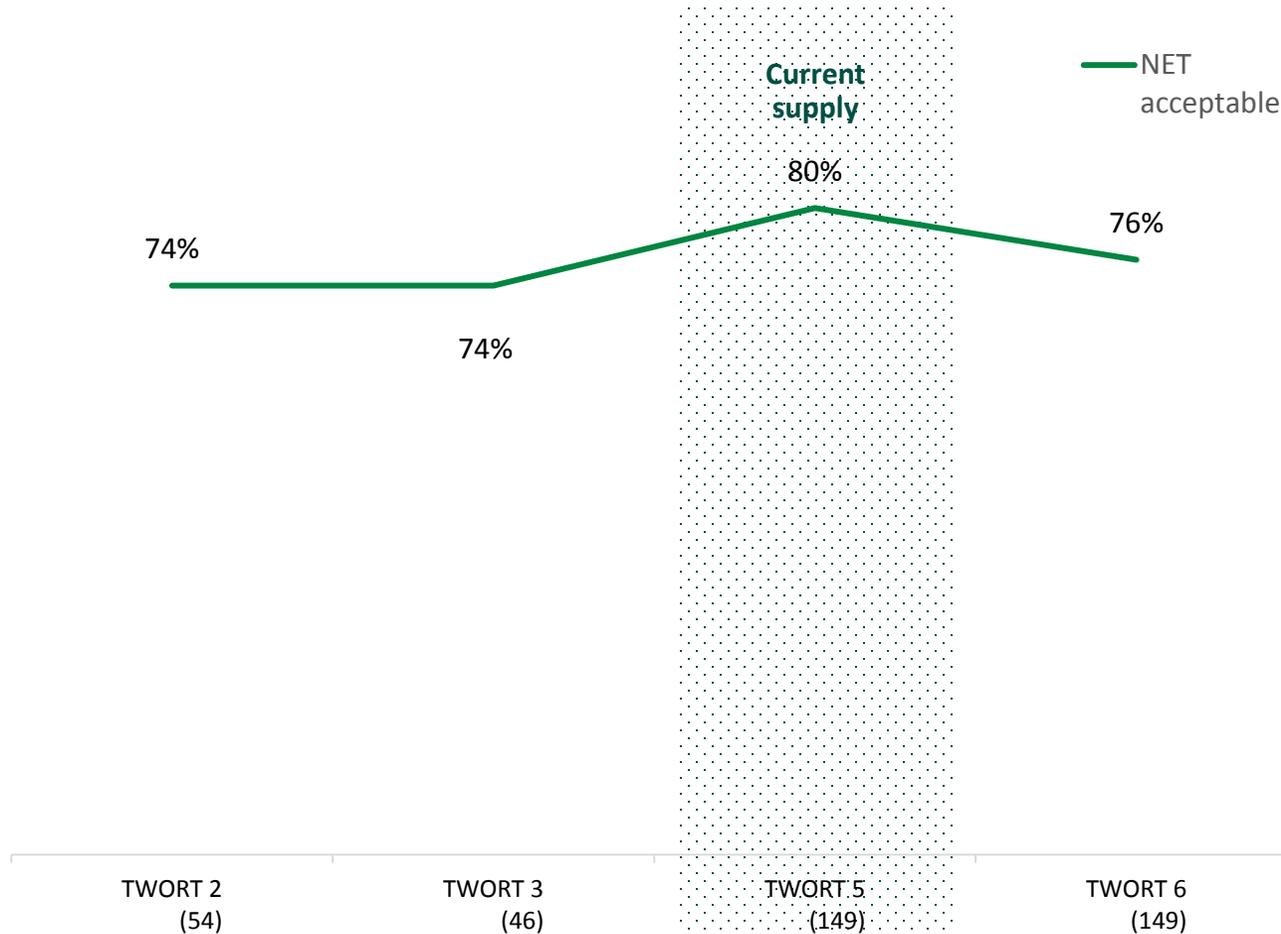
Female, Widnes (Twort 5)

Southport – Acceptability

Southport

Hall tests

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?



Satisfaction with taste of current water supply: **66% Satisfied**

Southport residents most preferred sample was their existing supply. Alternative supplies performed similarly, whether harder or softer.

No Twort was deemed to be significantly worse than their current supply – even a shift to the hardest supply available acceptability is likely to remain high.

“Yeah, I preferred that one, there’s a crisper taste.”

Southport (Twort 5)

“I gave it all 4’s, I found that a lot more pleasant than first one.”

Southport (Twort 5)

Q09. for this sample, how acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water? (base = see chart)

Southport – Acceptability

How acceptable would you find this water if it was supplied to your home as daily drinking water?

Customers in Southport felt **Twort 2** tasted **different to their normal supply**, leaving them with an **aftertaste** and feedback reflected this.

“I didn’t like that because to me it wasn’t clear it was like a funny taste. It tasted dry to me.”

Female, Southport (Twort 2)

“I wouldn’t complain about it but there is a chemically after taste.”

Male, Southport (Twort 2)

Twort 3 was also viewed **less favorably** by residents in Southport with customers again mentioning an **aftertaste**.

“I scored it a 2 because I’m left with an aftertaste. I did originally score it a 3, but I’m left with an aftertaste so.”

Male, Southport (Twort 3)

“I gave it a 2 for taste. It just doesn’t taste like the water I’m used to tasting.”

Male, Southport (Twort 3)

Twort 5 was correctly identified by customers in Southport as the water that they **typically get**, and feedback was **positive** for this level.

“I don’t know E just tasted smooth I didn’t get a sort of zing to it.”

Female, Southport (Twort 5)

“I didn’t mind that one I gave it a 4. That one seemed to have a clearer taste.”

Female, Southport (Twort 5)

Customers in Southport could **taste a difference** with **Twort 6** claiming that it again had an **aftertaste** and seemed **thicker**.

“I didn’t score it very high to be honest, I thought it had a fluoride taste and I didn’t enjoy it at all.”

Male, Southport (Twort 6)

“That one definitely has an after taste, it just tastes a bit thicker.”

Female, Southport (Twort 6)

Summary of acceptability

Despite slight variations across the locations, changing Twort level are likely to be accepted in the majority of cases. Perhaps the only location where the data has flagged a potential issue is with the highest Twort tested in Crewe.

Wythenshawe
Twort 1

Wythenshawe residents were more accepting of Twort level 4 over their current supply. Interestingly they were more negative about the samples in between their current supply and Twort 4.

Widnes
Twort 4

The current water supply in Widnes was the most accepted along with Twort 2. This was marginally ahead of the even softer sample tested.

The worst performing water in terms of acceptability was Twort 3.

Crewe
Twort 2

The current water supply in Crewe was also the most accepted ; even ahead of the softer water tested – Twort 1.
The least accepted was the highest Twort level – level 4.

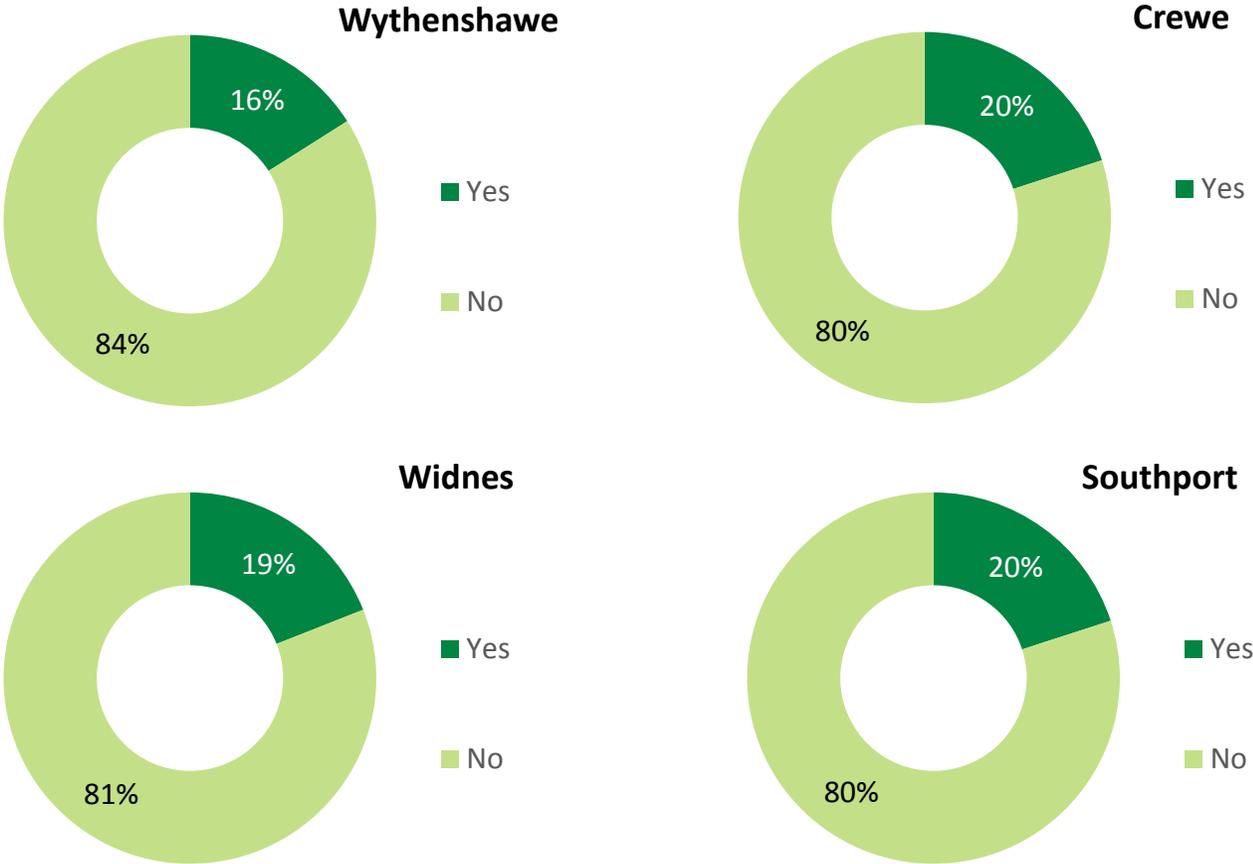
Southport
Twort 5

The current water supply in Southport was most accepted, marginally ahead of both the softer and harder samples tested.

Communication on water transfer

Around a fifth claimed to know where their water is sourced from, however it was often vague or inaccurate

Do you know where the water supplied to your home is sourced from?



Amongst those who gave a response to the question, a lot of the answers were varied and non-specific.

As an example, residents in Widnes said the following:

- Lake Vyrnwy
- Wales
- Derbyshire
- North West
- Warrington
- The Lake District
- Chester
- boreholes

Only a few correctly specifically identified the River Dee as its source

Knowledge of current water source

Not many customers correctly knew where their water is sourced from...

Customers gave various answers to where their water came from; these varied from the **Lake District** to **local reservoirs**.

"I wouldn't mind knowing, but I'd imagine it comes from the Lake District."

Male, Southport

"I think it comes from reservoirs and that, but it would be nice to know which one."

Male, Crewe

The majority of customers expressed that they were **not deeply concerned** about where their water was sourced from.

"I'm not bothered as long as it's clean fresh water, it's not an issue."

Female, Crewe

"It's all about the end result if the quality is good, I'm not really worried where it has come from."

Male, Wythenshawe

Ultimately, customers trust that United Utilities provide **quality water** and ensure that it is **safe for them to drink**.

"Yeah, I'm the same I just trust that when I turn on the tap, I'm getting quality water."

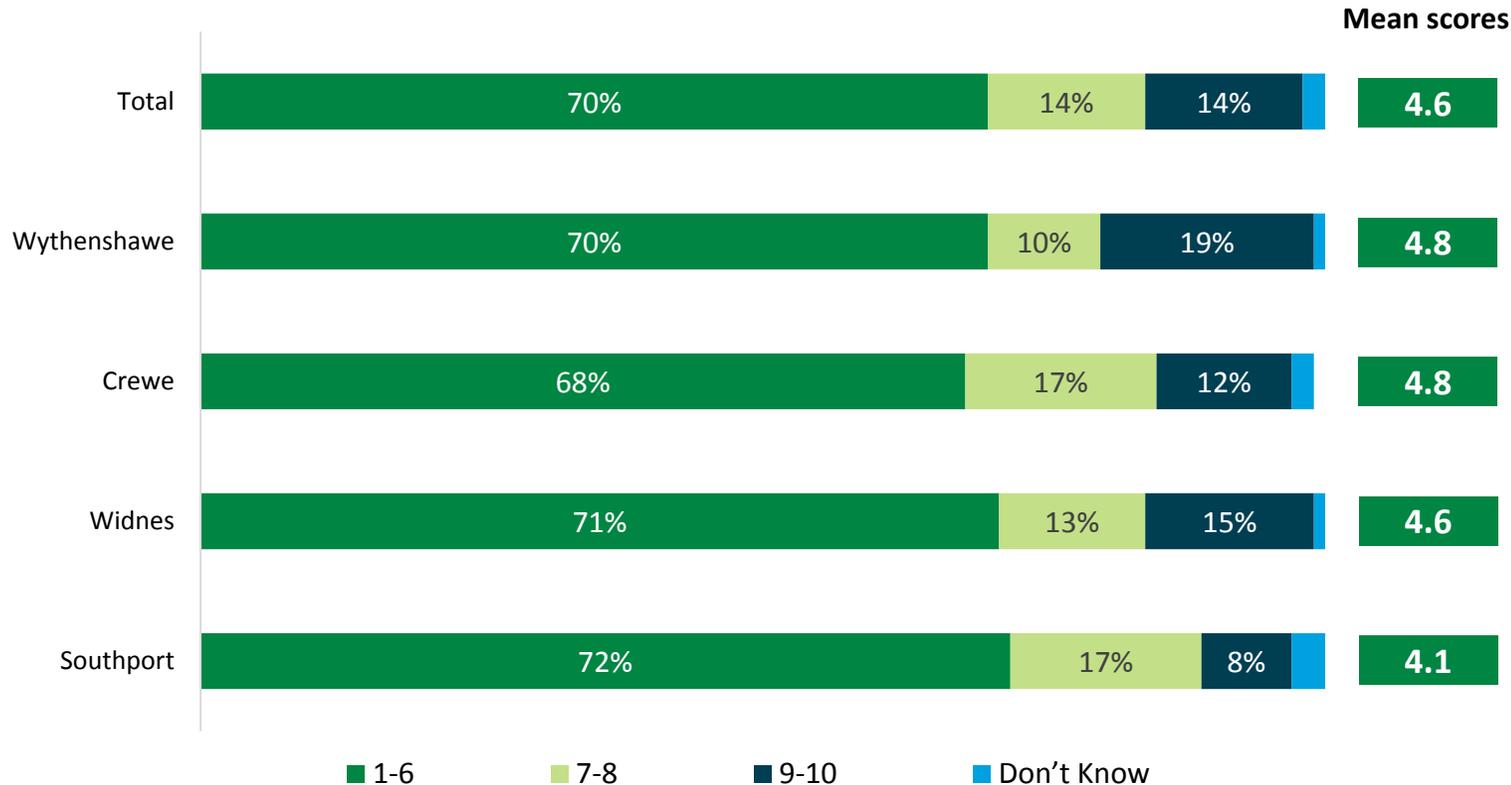
Male, Southport

"Yeah, it still goes through the same process and checks so I'm not concerned."

Female, Wythenshawe

Almost 7 in 10 said they would be relatively unconcerned by a change in their water supply

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all concerned and 10 is very concerned, how concerned would you be if United Utilities changed the source of the water in your area?



Perhaps due to having a current hard water supply, those in Southport were less likely to be concerned with a change in their supply

Regardless of location bill payers were significantly more likely to be concerned (4.7 v 3.7)

Those who have or have someone in the household with a disability were significantly more likely to have scored a 9-10 in degree of concern (21% vs 11%).

“Providing the quality wasn’t too different and providing it was temporary I wouldn’t be too concerned.”

Male, Southport

“It’s supply and demand; if the quality is good enough it doesn’t matter where it has come from.”

Male, Wythenshawe

Q024. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all concerned and 10 is very concerned, how concerned would you be if United Utilities changed the source of the water in your area?? (All respondents = Total: 593. Crewe: 98, Wythenshawe: 150, Widnes: 196, Southport: 149)

Of those who said they would be concerned, the most common concern was that the quality of the new supply would be worse than what they are currently being supplied

What would be your concerns?

"I want to know where it's coming from. I would be concerned that the taste smell and colour would not be the same as what I get now."

Crewe

"My dad has health problems, so I'd want to be sure that it was ok for him to drink."

Crewe

"I'd just wonder why and what the problem was with the first water."

Widnes

"I know where its coming from and I'm happy with that. Would I be getting the same quality"

Crewe

"In case the water was worse than what we are getting now."

Southport

"I want to know if it isn't as good"

Southport

"I don't want it to change because I like it."

Widnes

"Depending on where it's from it can be hard or soft and I prefer soft water"

Wythenshawe

"Not sure what source it's coming from, is it going to be cleaned properly."

Wythenshawe

It is important to remain mindful of customers who do have concerns...

How concerned would you be if United Utilities changed the source of the water in your area?

29%

of customers expressed high levels of concern.

Some residents did express **greater concerns** than others with regards to United Utilities **changing their water source**.

A customer from Southport had **sensitive skin** and explained to us that even the **slightest change** in his water can alter how his skin feels and can **result in his skin becoming irritated**. So much so that during the washing up task, he felt certain waters were **reacting badly on his skin and causing his skin to peel**.

Furthermore, a customer from Wythenshawe had similar concerns. She told us that she has a **sensitive stomach** and explained that a **change in her water** could potentially **aggravate her stomach further**.

Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that **every customer is different** and may have **different needs from their supplier**.

"I'm quite unique in that if I have a massive change in the water my skin just starts to peel ever so slightly, and it's just started to do that with the last one. If I go abroad on holiday, I tend to get that."

Male, Southport

"That's literally started to peel my skin off, but the minimal difference in water does that to me."

Male, Southport

"I don't want to turn the tap on and think 'what the hell!'"

Female, Wythenshawe

Three quarters of customers would want to be notified of a change

In the scenario that United Utilities were to change the source of the water that supplies your home, would you want to be notified about this change?

	Online Survey	Wythenshawe	Crewe	Widnes	Southport
Would want to be notified about a change in water supply – Yes	75%	78%	84 %	80%	80%

How likely would you be to contact United Utilities in the event that you were notified that the source of the water for your home would be changing?

	Online Survey	Wythenshawe	Crewe	Widnes	Southport
How likely would you be to contact United Utilities if notified – NET: Likely	27%	59%	37 %	49%	40%
Very likely	11%	36%	17%	26%	22%
Likely	15%	23%	20%	23%	18%

The majority of customers said they want to be notified of a change and around half suggested they would be likely to contact United Utilities if they were notified of a change, although this reduced to a quarter who said very likely (26%).

A change in the water supply is likely something most customers haven't come across yet and as a result, when asked if they would want to be notified, this high percentage (around 80%) probably comes from a place of curiosity or 'it wouldn't hurt to know more'.

Something mentioned in the focus groups was a desire for transparency on this activity, provided they were given information on, how long and why they were largely accepting.

Wythenshawe residents would be the most likely to contact United Utilities in the event of a change in supply – in part perhaps because they have a soft supply, some may be precious of this fact.

Q026. In the scenario that United Utilities were to change the source of the water that supplies your home, would you want to be notified about this change?

(All respondents = Total: 593. Crewe: 98, Wythenshawe: 150, Widnes: 196, Southport: 149)

Q028. How likely would you be to contact United Utilities in the event that you were notified that the source of the water for your home would be changing?(All who would want to be notified of change = Total:

474. Crewe: 82, Wythenshawe: 117, Widnes: 156, Southport: 119))

A large proportion of customers would like to be notified

Would you like to be notified if United Utilities changed the source of the water in your area?

Most customers in all areas held similar views in the sense that they are **customers of United Utilities** and should be **treated accordingly**.

A proportion of customers expressed how they are actually **paying for a service** and therefore **should be notified if there is going to be a change** to the said service they are paying for.

As discussions progressed a lot of customers **compared United Utilities to other utility companies** which provide gas and electricity and felt that **if these companies notify their customers of changes, then so should United Utilities**.

“See we are a customer aren’t we at the end of the day so rather than just treat us as though we’re nothing, we’re paying for it so just tell us when it is changing, where it’s coming from or if anything is going on they should let you know at some point because at the end of the day we are paying for it.”

Male, Crewe

“I’d be annoyed if I wasn’t notified, I am a customer, it’s a product I’m buying at the end of the day, so I think you’ve got every right to know if it’s changed and then know the change back.”

Male, Southport

“With other companies you have contracts with them, you pay them and have an account with them, and they notify you of any changes to your bill or anything so I suppose it would be nice then to know because how often do you hear from the water board.”

Female, Crewe

Email

stated most commonly as best method of communication.

Leaflet

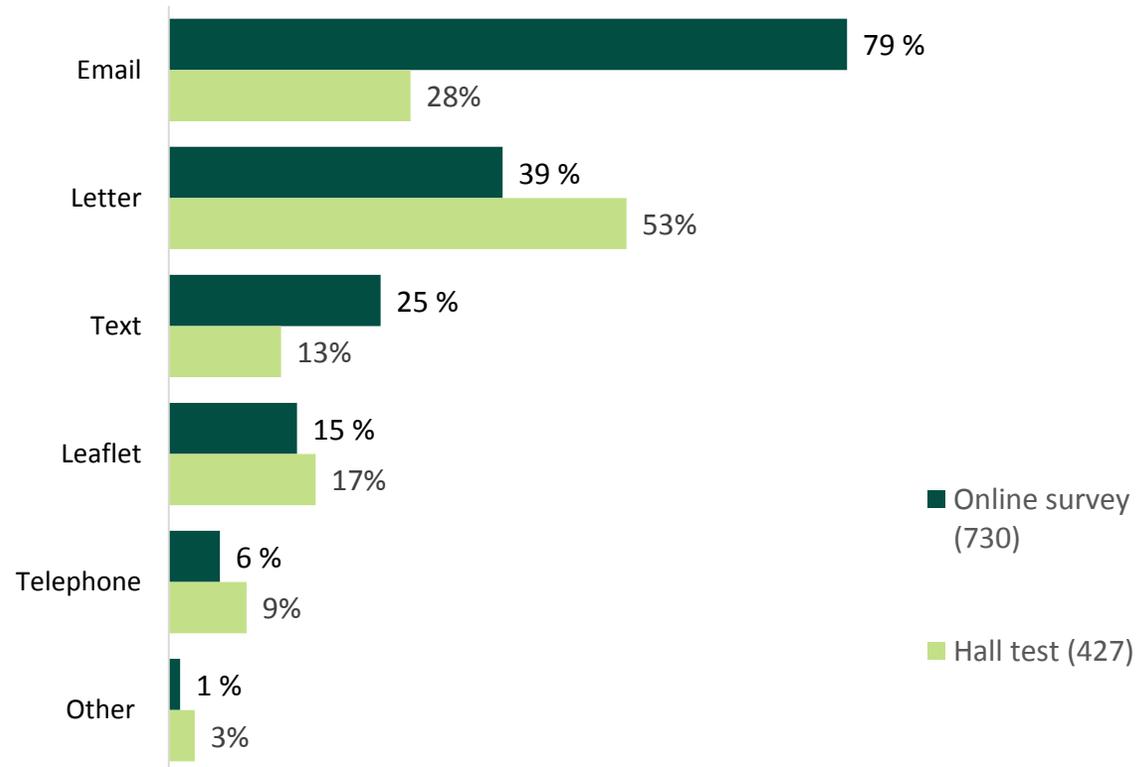
also commonly suggested as a method of communication.

Media

suggested by a small number of customers (tv ad, social media announcement).

Through the hall tests and focus groups it became apparent a letter would appeal to a majority

How would you want to be notified?



As with the online survey, the majority of customers said they want to be made aware of changes to their supply

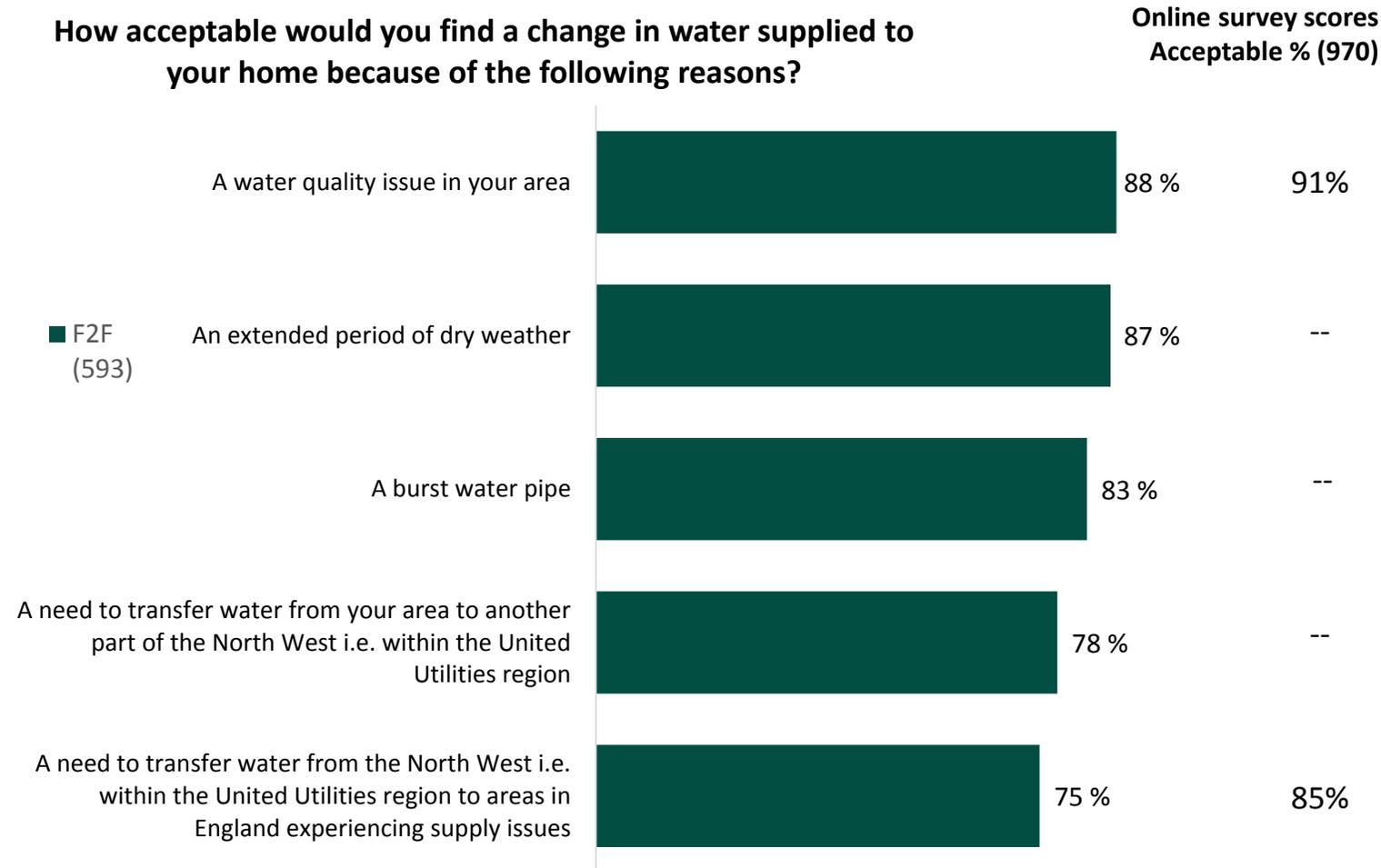
Interestingly, those who took part in our hall tests were significantly more likely to say they would prefer a letter (53%) compared to the online sample (37%). Whereas email was the preferred method of communicating a change to supply (79%).

A third of under 55's would prefer email compared to 15% of over 75's. A higher proportion of this age group would prefer text too. .

"I don't want to be bombarded with emails, but it would be nice to be informed just to say it was changing."

Female, Wythenshawe

Customers are understanding of challenges faced by United Utilities and are likely to accept the reason for a change in supply



This positive response mirrors that seen in the online survey

Those in Crewe were most accepting. There were no major differences across demographic groups.

Customers were largely accepting of the reasons for potential changes in water source...

How acceptable would you find a change in water supplied to your home because of the following reasons?

The consensus within the customer focus groups was **largely accepting of the reasons for a potential change** in the source of their water.

“As long as I carried on getting something I wouldn’t be bothered where it came from.”

Male, Crewe

“I’m not bothered, if needs must and it needs to come from another area.”

Male, Wythenshawe

As well as this many customers acknowledged that often water may need to be redirected to **meet supply and demand needs**.

“It’s supply and demand, if the quality is good enough it doesn’t matter where it has come from. I’d be more concerned if the price went up.”

Male, Wythenshawe

“I think that’s fair; the water should be shared across the country you can’t just like say that’s our reservoir and our water.”

Male, Southport

Some customers did feel that if any of the scenarios occurred there would **not be much they could do anyway**.

“I don’t think there’s much we can do in those circumstances; they would have to get it from somewhere else wouldn’t they?”

Female, Wythenshawe

“They’re all legitimate reasons, how could you complain when there’s nothing you can do about a drought.”

Female, Crewe

Only a few customers expressed concerns, and this was largely to do with if they received lower quality water as a result of the change.

“I think it depends on the quality, obviously if other areas are suffering, we should help but if we’re left with poorer quality because were helping someone else how is that fair?”

Female, Southport

Key take outs

Key take-outs

It is evident from this research that water quality is something that many customers hold strong views on but the majority are unable to clearly distinguish between the quality of different Tworts - especially when it comes to taste. Some appear to simply prefer the taste of softer water whilst others prefer harder water.

The majority found the taste of all Tworts acceptable across the 4 locations, suggesting that changing Twort level will be accepted in the majority of cases.

The only exception was in Crewe where significantly less found the harder Twort 4 acceptable compared to the current Twort 2.

This was mirrored in the lather-ability tests, although there was less acceptance of some of the higher Tworts in the softer water areas.

In the hot water tests, the higher Tworts resulted in duller looking tea and an accompanying scum.

Around half of customers felt it is important to know where their water comes from. This varied by location – with 24% more wanting to know in Wythenshawe vs. Southport.

The majority say they would want to be notified of a change in their water source.

The main message to get across is reassurance about the quality and safety of their water.

Letter was the most preferred channel, followed by email.

Most were accepting of the reasons why their source would change. Transferring water outside of the region was the least accepted, yet still had 75% acceptability. This mirrored sentiment in the focus groups.

Whilst most would not notice a change if not told, some people are highly sensitive to changes to their supply which can aggravate medical issues such as irritated skin and irritated bowels. Could these individuals be identified on the PSR? Or could general comms cater for these groups?

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