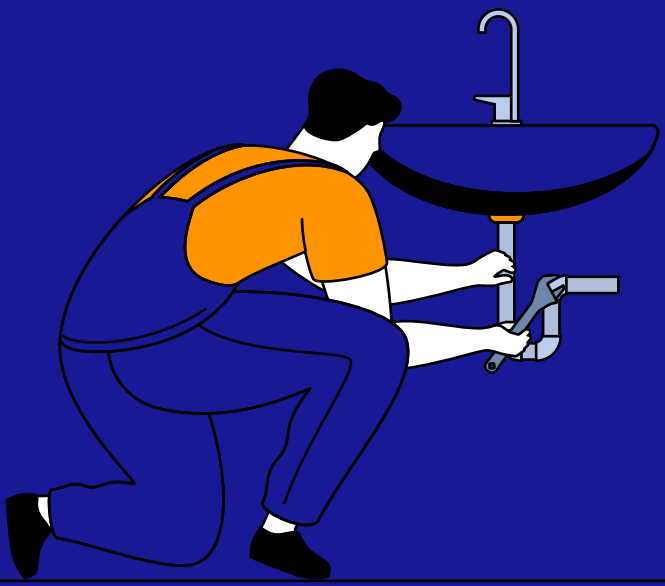
Mastering Water Efficiency:

A Home Visit Guide to Behaviour Change



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Toolkit overview

What is it?

The Social Science and Water Efficiency Engagement (SWEE) toolkit gives you easy, practical ways to inspire customers to save water and helps them feel more connected to how they use water during your home visits.

What's it for?

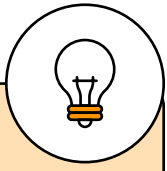
To offer simple tools, giving you confidence to have engaging conversations with customers about encouraging water efficiency behaviours.

What's it for?

- Explore what behaviour change in water means and show how it works in home visits.
- Share straightforward tips for working with different households.
- Help you refresh and build your influencing skills.

How to use it

- Use Part 1 & 2 to get familiar with the basics and check your strengths.
- Use Parts 2, 3 & 4 as quick reminders before or after visits.
- Share experiences with colleagues to build skills.



Why is this different?

This is meant to motivate you to learn new concepts, including behavioural influencing techniques that can be incorporated into home visits for lasting change.

Part 1

Laying the Foundations of Behaviour Change

Introduction

Your work plays a role in solving Britain's water crisis. By 2050, we could be short nearly 5 billion litres of water a day. About a third of this can be saved just by helping homes and businesses use water wisely. Every leak you fix and every water-saving tip you share helps us reach the goal of 110 litres per person per day. You're making a real difference.

Every home visit is a chance to help people save water. You may fit devices, fix leaks, or give quick tips. But changing habits can be harder — people often don't think about their water use and you've only got a short time to make an impression.

By combining your practical know-how with a few behaviour change techniques, you can make your advice stick and help build long-term habits.

With more customers now using meters or smart meters, you have a great opportunity to help them understand their water use and bills. Your advice can make a real difference in helping families save water and money.

Behaviour change 101

What is behaviour change?

In simple terms, behaviour change is about helping people build new habits or adjust old ones so they use water more wisely. During a home visit, this might mean fitting a device, fixing a leak, or communicating behaviour change advice.

But behaviour change isn't just about giving tips. From the moment you step through the door, the way you interact, listen, and guide the conversation all shape whether people feel motivated to act.

To support this, we introduce Behavioural Influencing Tactics (or BITs), practical tools to help you make change obvious, easy, and rewarding. BITs help you overcome challenges, strengthen conversations, and make new water-saving habits more likely to stick.

Different households

No two households are the same. Each visit means meeting people with different needs, values, and routines.

This variety is what makes the work so rewarding, but it also means there is no one-size-fits-all approach to water efficiency or behaviour change.

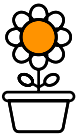
There isn't a single solution for saving water, so stay flexible and adapt your advice. Focus on what matters most to each household, such as comfort, cost, convenience, pride, hygiene, or responsibility.

People who are well-off or rent with bills included might care more about helping the environment than saving money. People with less money may be more interested in saving on hot water and energy bills.

Values

You may also come across a range of values linked to water use, so it's worth thinking about the following:

Comfort: Enjoying long showers, frequent laundry, and lush gardens.



Pride and identity: Using water to keep the home, garden, and self looking good.

Convenience: Showering, washing clothes, and dishes frequently to achieve cleanliness easily.

Responsibility: Believing in conserving water and protecting the environment.

Hygiene: Frequent showers and laundry to maintain cleanliness standards.

Financial awareness: Being mindful of the cost of water and related activities.

Activity 1

Your Approach

10 mins

Grab a notepad and reflect on your personal visit style.

1. How do you currently promote behaviour change?
2. Can you note down some examples?
3. What area would you like to work on or strengthen?

Write down one goal.

Activity 2

Spotting patterns

10 mins

After a day of visits, take 10 minutes to review:

1. Where and how did people use water in the home?
2. Did any habits or uses stand out to you?
3. What similarities and differences have you noticed between households?

Note one insight that you could share with colleagues.

Activity 3

Share and compare

10 mins

Chat to a colleague for 10 minutes:

1. Ask what values or motivations you have noticed around water use in the past month?
2. Discuss what similarities or differences you have seen between households?

Together identify something you could both try in your next visit.

Part 2

Behavioural Influencing Tactics (BITs)

Behavioural Influencing Tactics (BITs)

BITs are tools from behavioural science to make water-saving easier.

Three types:

1. **Reflective:** Encourage consideration by presenting facts and knowledge for informed decisions.
2. **Semi-automatic:** Use simple cues or actions that require some thought.
3. **Automatic:** Employ quick emotional or habitual signals to prompt immediate action.

Top tips:

- Tailor your approach – one size doesn't fit all.
- Combine BITs for stronger impact.
- Keep it simple – don't overload with facts.

Knowledge Transfer

(reflective BIT)

What is it:

Knowledge transfer is about sharing information and facts to raise awareness, shape attitudes, and support water-efficient behaviours.

Why it matters:

The more people understand water scarcity and efficiency, the more likely they are to adopt positive attitudes and actions toward conservation.

Example of delivery:

You could explain water scarcity in the UK, its causes and impacts, or highlight how much water different behaviours or devices use. Sharing the potential savings from simple actions or behaviour changes helps make the benefits clear.

Impact tip:

Knowledge transfer is important but usually not enough on its own. Combine it with other interventions like device installations, leak fixes, or other BITs to encourage lasting change.

Increasing self-efficacy

(reflective BIT)

What is it:

Increasing self-efficacy means helping people believe they can successfully adopt a water-saving behaviour.

Why it matters:

Motivation alone isn't enough. By boosting self-efficacy, people are more likely to form new habits, stick with them, and overcome setbacks.

Example of delivery:

You can increase self-efficacy by setting achievable goals, breaking tasks into smaller steps, encouraging positive self-talk, reframing negative perceptions of water, and highlighting current water efficient behaviours or usage practices.

Impact tip:

This can be task-specific and tailored to the customer/household. Someone may feel confident about one action but unsure about another.

Social norms

(semi-reflective BIT)

What is it:

Using social norms means presenting a behaviour as common or typical, showing that others also do it.

Why it matters:

People tend to follow what others do. Making water efficient actions appear normal increases the likelihood householders will adopt them.

Example of delivery:

You can frame tips or advice as common practice, for example, "Many households I visit already do this," or "This behaviour is becoming the norm." Avoid highlighting unsustainable behaviours, as this could unintentionally encourage them.

Impact tip:

Use local or relatable examples where possible - like "other families in this area" - to provide concrete social proof, making the behaviour more persuasive and relatable.

Framing
(semi-reflective BIT)

What is it:

Framing means presenting an action or message in a way that highlights certain values, without changing the core information.

Why it matters:

People respond not just to facts, but to how information feels. The way water-saving choices are presented can influence how they are understood and acted upon.

Example of delivery:

You might frame advice around intrinsic goals, linking behaviours to personal values, identity, or meaning, such as pride in helping the environment or creating a sustainable future. Alternatively, frame them around extrinsic goals, emphasising external rewards like social collective action, recognition or monetary savings from reducing bills.

Impact tip:

Use suggestive language ("you could do this") rather than assertive commands ("you should do this") to improve engagement and encourage positive action.

Tailoring
(Semi-reflective BIT)

What is it:

Tailoring advice means adapting water efficiency guidance to the household and its unique circumstances.

Why it matters:

People are more likely to adopt behaviours that feel personally relevant. Customised advice increases confidence and makes lasting change more likely.

Example of delivery:

Ask about each household's routines and needs, then tailor water-saving tips to their lifestyle. Be mindful of vulnerable customers, such as those with health conditions, and offer supportive advice. Where relevant, mention services like the priority register and safe ways to repurpose water.

Impact tip:

Stay flexible, adjust your approach based on the household's answers, treating advice as a conversation rather than a script.

Priming
(Automatic BIT)

What is it:

Using subtle cues (words, visuals, or conversation topics) on topics that might be connected to or unrelated to water efficiency that people process unconsciously.

Why it matters:

Priming helps guide people's thinking and reinforces direct water efficiency discussions.

Examples of delivery:

Use positive words and encouragement throughout your visit to encourage an empowering feeling. Have an opening discussion about climate change, drought, or water scarcity and the impact our society is having on the planet to prime the audience on the topic of water efficiency by evoking a sense of responsibility. Start with unrelated chats about hobbies or the home to build pride and identity before discussing water efficiency.

Impact tip:

Try and be relaxed and use a friendly tone when discussing unrelated primes, some households may be willing to have a general chat others might not.

Emotional shortcut

(automatic BIT)

What is it:

Evoking emotions to influence how people respond to a message.

Why it matters:

Facts alone rarely inspire behaviour change. Pairing information with emotions can make water efficiency messages more memorable and motivating.

Example of delivery:

Positive emotions can help build trust and cooperation, encouraging households to adopt water-saving behaviours. Negative emotions can appeal to people's moral values, prompting reflection on their impact. Humour can increase attention and reduce initial resistance, making discussions more engaging and relatable.

Impact tip:

Ensure emotions are appropriate, avoid creating hopelessness with negative emotions, and check if humour fits the situation.

Nudging
(automatic BIT)

What is it:

Nudging is a tactic that changes how choices are presented to make the "better" option easier or more obvious, without removing freedom of choice. In water efficiency, nudges make sustainable actions simpler or more noticeable.

Why it matters:

People don't always choose the most efficient option on their own. By subtly adjusting how choices are presented, nudges guide behaviour toward water conservation in predictable ways.

Example of delivery:

You might suggest a practical change like moving a device or changing a default setting to make the efficient option more convenient.

Impact tip:

Ensure the nudge is visible and intuitive. Use clear visuals, labels, or comparisons, and test your approach to guide behaviour without causing confusion or resistance.

Part 3

Techniques to influence behaviour

This section contains flashcards with simple examples of Behavioural Influencing Technicques (BITs) you can use in home visits.

Bathroom

Shorter showers

SIMPLE

BITs: Knowledge transfer | Framing | Tailoring | Social norms

Behaviour change:

Encourage households to take shorter showers or fewer baths by framing the behaviour as saving energy, reducing bills, and conserving water.

Potential savings:

15 litres of hot water per minute

1 minute less a day

£20 savings a month on energy and water bills.

Example of delivery:

- Explore current shower and bath habits (frequency, duration, and users).
- Share information about water and energy usage, tailored to their household context.
- Suggest practical actions like turning off water while lathering.
- Emphasise the benefits e.g. energy efficiency, lower bills and keeping more water in the environment.
- Address potential barriers collaboratively and co-develop solutions.
- Highlight that even small adjustments make a real difference.

Bathroom

Half-flush for wee

SIMPLE

BITs: Emotional shortcut | Priming | Social norms | Knowledge transfer

Behaviour change:

Encourage households to use the half or small flush correctly for urine, making the behaviour feel easy, smart, and socially approved. Use humour, priming cues, and social norms to reduce resistance and create a positive habit.

Potential savings:

3 litres
per flush

15-21
litres per person, per day

Example of delivery:

- Ask about current toilet habits and if they know which flush is the half or small flush.
- Explain that using the half-flush for urine is hygienic and safe.
- Show how to use the half-flush correctly.
- Mention that many households use this method successfully.
- Use humour and practical tips to make the habit easy and acceptable.
- Emphasise that small changes like this save a lot of water over time.

Kitchen

Dishwashing by hand

SIMPLE

BITs: Knowledge transfer | Increasing self-efficacy | Nudging | Priming

Behaviour change:

Encourage households to use a washing-up bowl or a full sink instead of letting the tap run continuously, by helping change feel doable and nudging people towards change.

Potential savings:

52 litres
a day

8 mins
of the tap running

Example of delivery:

- Ask about current washing-up habits (frequency, who does it, and if they leave the tap running).
- Share information on water usage and savings from using a bowl or full sink.
- Address concerns like rinsing glasses under running water with practical tips (e.g. rinsing while the bowl fills).
- Emphasise that this change is simple and achievable.
- Set small goals, like trying it for a week or after evening meals.
- Suggest buying a small washing-up bowl and note that many households find it convenient.

Kitchen

Turn off the tap while washing vegetables

SIMPLE

BITs: Priming | Tailoring | Self-efficacy | Framing | Nudging

Behaviour change:

Encourage households to turn off the tap while scrubbing vegetables, using positive messaging tailored to their routines and setting clear, simple goals.

Potential savings:

36 litres
a time

6 mins
under a running tap

Example of delivery:

- Use positive cues early on to present water-saving as smart and normal kitchen behaviour.
- Ask how households usually wash vegetables.
- If they use a running tap, suggest scrubbing vegetables in a bowl or sink, then rinsing all at once.
- Explain this method is as effective and saves water every time.
- Encourage them to try it for two weeks to see the benefits.
- Tailor messages: mention time savings for busy households and cost savings for those concerned about bills.

Kitchen

Reduce laundry loads

SIMPLE

BITs: Self-efficacy | Framing | Nudging | Tailoring

Behaviour change:

Motivate households to re-wear clothes and cut down on laundry. Build self-efficacy, use positive framing, and apply nudges and tailored approaches for practical results.

Potential savings:

30 litres
saved by using eco-mode

50-100 litres
saved per load reduced

Example of delivery:

- Ask households about their laundry routines, including how often they wash and which clothes they re-wear.
- Find out if they use eco-settings on their washing machine.
- Suggest easy challenges, like re-wearing one item before washing.
- Set clear goals, for example, wear jeans five times or t-shirts twice before washing.
- Encourage using simple checks (sniff or visual) before deciding to wash.
- Offer practical nudges, such as a 'clean-but-worn' drawer or hook for reused clothes.
- Explain that re-wearing clothes keeps them looking better and lasting longer.
- Present re-wearing as a smart, intentional choice, not laziness.
- Highlight that skipping even a few washes saves water, energy, money, and helps the environment.

Garden

Letting lawns go brown

ADVANCED

BITs: Social norms | Priming | Knowledge transfer | Emotional shortcut | Framing

Behaviour change:

Encourage households to let lawns brown during dry spells by using social norms, priming, and emotional cues to frame it as a community-minded and positive action already adopted by others.

Potential savings:

1,000 litres
used per hose per hour

60 mins
of watering

Example of delivery:

- Ask about current lawn-watering habits and highlight water usage.
- Explain that lawns can survive dry spells by going dormant and will recover with rain.
- Share how much water can be saved by not watering lawns.
- Use positive themes like resilience and community pride to reframe brown lawns as a "badge of honour".
- Mention that many neighbours already let their lawns rest, showing it's a common and valued action.
- Present the choice as proactive and meaningful, and reassure that grass will recover.

Garden

Hose to can

ADVANCED

BITs: Framing | Emotional shortcut | Nudging

Behaviour change:

Motivate households to use watering cans instead of hosepipes by highlighting environmental benefits for soil, plants, insects, and birds, and support new routines with simple nudges.

Potential savings:

145 litres
saved per 10 mins using the hose.

Example of delivery:

- Ask how they currently water their garden and why they use a hose, if relevant.
- Highlight that hosepipes use more water and are less efficient than watering cans.
- Explain that watering cans help keep more water in the soil for plants, insects, and birds.
- Mention that targeted watering benefits the wider environment and supports local wildlife.
- Suggest keeping the watering can by the tap and storing the hose in the shed to encourage the new habit.
- Encourage setting a small goal to try using the watering can instead of the hose.
- Personalise the advice by referencing local rivers, woodlands, or wildlife, showing how this change helps both the garden and the local ecosystem.

Garden

Smart splashing

ADVANCED

BITs: Tailoring | Self-efficacy | Social norms | Framing

Behaviour change:

Promoting responsible use of paddling pools, hot tubs, and water toys can help reduce water waste. Clear, relevant advice encourages individuals to adopt more sustainable habits.

Potential savings:

1,000-2,200
litres per hot tubs

400 to 1000
litres per paddling pool

10,000 to 30,000
litres per pool

Example of delivery:

For paddling pools, suggest filling only halfway, marking a fill line, and sharing with neighbours or friends. Encourage reusing the water for gardens or posting in local groups. Recommend covering the pool to keep the water clean.

For hot tubs, ask how often they change the water and if they use treatments efficiently. Proper treatment reduces the need for frequent changes and saves water.

For households without pools, praise their behaviour and suggest alternatives like local pools or low-water play like water pistols.

Ways to save water

Wash up in a bowl, rather than under a running tap

52 litres a day

Use one button only on a dual flush toilet

20 litres a day

Wash your car with a bucket rather than a hose

30 litres per wash

Run the **washing machine full**, on **eco-mode**

30 litres per load

Ditch the hose for a watering can

145 litres per water

Keep drinking water in the fridge rather than running the tap

12 litres a day

Cut **2 mins off your shower**

30 litres per shower

Turn off the tap when you brush your teeth

28 litres a day

Wash / peel vegetables in a bowl rather than under a running tap

36 litres a time

Fill the bath **one inch less full**

10 litres per bath

Fix a leaking loo

400 litres a day

Switch from hand washing to using the dishwasher

60 litres a day

Source: Weir The Agency. Please note this list is not exhastive and actual savings vary according to fixtures, water pressure and behaviour.

Activity 1

Behaviour change comms sprint

15 mins

Goal:
Practice designing messages that make behaviour change stick.

1. Pick a behaviour you want to influence or change.
2. Write down how you normally discuss it and map out the conversation.
3. Identify which BITs you might already use in this.
4. Draft a new approach that trials 1-2 extra BITs and write a short example of what you could say.
5. Share with a colleague, note their response, and adjust for real-life visits.

Activity 2

BIT troubleshooting sprint

15 mins

Goal:
Solve tricky behaviour change challenges using BITs.

1. List 1-2 behaviours that are hard to influence.
2. Write why these behaviours are challenging (time, habits, beliefs).
3. Choose 1-2 BITs from your toolkit that could help.
4. Draft a 1-2 sentence example using the identified BITs tailored to that challenge.
5. Try it with a colleague, note feedback, and plan how to trial it in practice.

Part 4

Building Connection and Engagement in a Visit

Checklist

- **Warm intro:** Smile, explain your role, be clear and friendly.
- **Listen:** Ask about routines, what matters to them, summarise back.
- **Tailor:** Link advice to their routines and values.

Quick reflection:

After a visit, jot down one thing that worked and one thing to improve.

Handling Challenges

Debunking Myths

Some households misunderstand water usage, efficient behaviours, or common myths about the water industry and your role.

- Listen for any misunderstandings about water use or the water industry.
- Show you value their view.
- Stay calm and friendly when correcting them.
- Give simple, clear facts.
- This builds trust and helps people accept water-saving advice.

Handling Challenges

Addressing Scepticism and Concern

- Listen to and acknowledge worries.
- Show how changes help them (save money, easier, good for the environment).
- Suggest small, easy actions.
- Talk through any barriers together.
- This makes people more likely to try new habits.

Handling Challenges

Disengaged Customers

- Personalise your approach—ask what matters to them.
- Be friendly and involve them in solutions.
- Adjust advice if something isn't possible for them.
- If they don't care about one thing, suggest something else.
- This keeps them engaged and open to saving water.

Engagement scenarios

Handling Challenges

When someone isn't bothered (apathy)

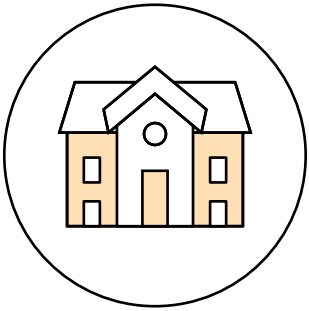
- Link water saving to what they do care about (money, comfort, family).
- Suggest one small, easy step (e.g. shorter showers, half-flush).
- Use humour or pride: 'Easy win - less effort, lower bills.'

Handling Challenges

When money isn't a motivator

(affluent households)

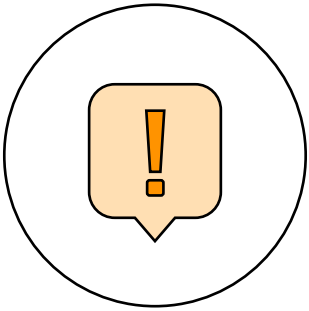
- Talk about pride, legacy, and protecting the environment.
- Highlight what others in their community are doing.
- Frame it as choice and reputation: "Doing your bit sets an example."



Handling Challenges

When trust is low (distrustful households)

- Be clear about who you are and why you're there.
- Keep language simple, avoid jargon.
- Suggest one low-risk, easy change to try first.
- Point to independent info if they want to check.



FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions

What are these tactics for?
To help households save water easily and remember to do it.

Can I combine different BITs?
Yes, using more than one works best.

What if I'm unsure which technique to use?
Pick the easiest first, then add more if you feel comfortable. Try things out.

Can I use a range of BITs in one visit?
Yes, mix and match for different people and behaviours.

Are these techniques rules I must follow?
No, use your judgement and adapt to the situation.

Can I create my own approach?
Absolutely, as long as it helps people save water and feels supportive.

How do I know if a household is responding?
Look for interest, questions, or enthusiasm. Change approach if they seem unsure.

How long should I spend on behaviour change discussion?
Under 10 minutes per behaviour is enough.

What's the most important tip?
Listen, watch, and adjust. Make it easy, relevant, and clear.

Where can I learn more?

We created this toolkit using insights from a wide range of research. Below are a couple of key sources that you might find useful to explore again.

Koop, S. H. A., Van Dorssen, A. J., and Brouwer, S. (2019). *Enhancing domestic water conservation behaviour: A review of empirical studies on influencing tactics.* Journal of Environmental Management, 247, pp. 867–876. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2019.06.126

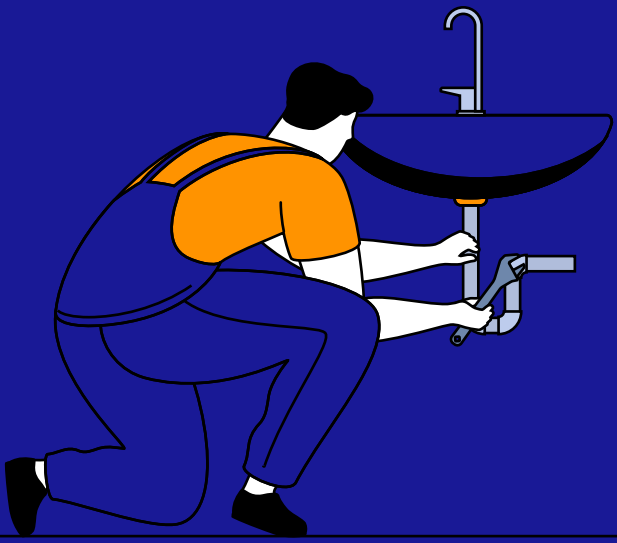
Consumer Council for Water, (2023). *Desktop review of behaviour change campaigns.* Birmingham: CCW. https://www.ccw.org.uk/publication/desktop-review-of-behaviour-change-campaigns/

For further information on water scarcity and water efficiency you can review the waterwise evidence database, which can be found here https://database.waterwise.org.uk/

Credits

The Social Science and Water Efficiency Engagement (SWEE) Toolkit was developed between April–October 2025 by **Glasgow Caledonian University (Dr Fatima Ajia and Dr Luka Vucinic)** and **Artesia Consulting**, funded by the **Water Efficiency Collaborative Fund**.

The peer-reviewed project explored how home visitors deliver behaviour change and created a practical, on-the-job resource to support everyday conversations with households. It drew on the academic paper *Enhancing Domestic Water Conservation Behaviour* (Koop et al., 2019).

The project was guided by a steering group including: Affinity Water, Aqualogic, Cenergist, Groundwork London, Northumbrian Water, PN Daly, Southeast Water, Thames Water, and Waterwise.
Design by **Weir The Agency**.

Ajia, F., Vucinic, L., Cahill, J., Andrewartha, T. (2025) Mastering Water Efficiency: A Home Visit Guide to Behaviour Change [The Social Science and Water Efficiency Engagement (SWEE) Project]. London: Glasgow Caledonian University London and Artesia, November 2025.