

Your Voice Customer Engagement Subgroup

2 February 2024

Minutes

Your voice members	United Utilities
Steve Cullen- Subgroup Chair Dr Tayo Adebawale – Independent member Bernice Law – Independent Chair Lucy Byrne – Independent member Peter Fitzhenry – Support to the Panel Apologises: Dave Thompson– Independent member Sue Lomas – Independent member	Ben Nadel Shy Bayly Mike Gauterin

1. 24 November 2023 Minutes and Challenge Log

- A deep dive into water efficiency went to the 31 January 2024 Stakeholder sub group. (Complete)
- UU to invite YV to any workshop about Smart Meters (ongoing)
- New customer licence conditions (February 2024 agenda item)

2. ODI Quarterly performance update: customer indicators

Mike Gauterin (MG) took the group through the latest quarterly performance update. MG highlighted a number of specific measures including water quality, CMEX, DMEX, PCC, PSR, water poverty, voids, and lead in water.

Steve Cullen (SC) explained that water consumption in Spain had recently been restricted because of drought conditions to two hundred litres per person per day. This appears significantly higher than UU's target. SC also asked if there was any update about the establishment of a national PSR register.

MG advised that UU is working with other water companies to standardise their approach to the PSR but that there is no movement towards a national approach to a PSR.

Q. Bernice Law (BL) welcomed the move towards supporting residents with lead pipework to get access to qualified plumbers.

A. MG advised that UU is planning to move from a reactive approach to replacing lead water pipework towards a more proactive approach whereby UU will target streets with known lead pipework. UU will take responsibility for engaging with the plumbing sector. The next AMP will hopefully see an increase from 10,000 to 30,000 household lead pipe replacements.

Q. Tayo Adebawale (TA) welcomed the new approach towards lead pipe replacement. TA asked if any related publicity communications could set out the additional benefits (health, water quality, financial) of replacing this pipework.

A. MG confirmed that UU would take on board these suggestions and that the Five County delivery teams would be involve in promoting this pipe replacement work.

3. Customer License Condition

Shy Bayly (SB) explained OFWAT's expectation that customer needs and expectations should be identified, understood, and met by water companies. Compliance commences on 12 February 2024. SB set out an overview of the customer license conditions and the need to underpin any proposed strategy with effective customer research (audit, design, and continuous measurement).

Q. SC asked how UU proposed to access/consult with specific vulnerable customers. SC also offered support to engage vulnerable people in getting involved in research projects.

A. SB advised that UU would use a number of tools to involve and engage vulnerable customers including PSR data, consulting engaged customers, and collaborating with vulnerable customer groups to co-create research projects. UU's approach is to try and create a balanced view from a variety of sources. SB welcomed the support offer and that the issue of engaging vulnerable customers would be raised with the Affordability & Vulnerability Panel. **(Action)**.

Q. TA asked if UU had a full profile of North West disabled customers. TA asked if there is any correlation between the region's disability profiles and customers registered with priority services. TA also asked how UU captured customers changing health needs over time.

A. SB stated that there are disability markers within the priority services register and that UU do try and use this data to anticipate potential changes in health over time. SB stated that more work was required to compare the PSR information with that for the North West's population profile. **(Action)**.

Q. BL asked for clarification about how UU are preparing to meet the terms of the new license conditions.

A. Ben Nadel (BN) advised that the conditions represent a set of minimum customer standards and that there will be further detailed information set out in OFWAT's customer license guidance. UU has a meeting scheduled with OFWAT to discuss the customer license guidance. BN advised that UU is compliant with the majority of these proposed conditions and principles but not necessarily with all of the new guidance. Any compliance gaps will be the subject of further work.

Q. TA asked about any implications for PSR data sharing.

A. BN advised that there is ongoing work around data sharing with other water companies and other utilities. BN anticipates that this data sharing work is a number of years away from completion. There may be some legislative proposals that aid the move towards more comprehensive data sharing.

4. Customer Research Update

Shy Bayly (SB) stated that UU's latest research programme has seven customer research projects in various states of completeness (fieldwork, pre fieldwork, complete, pending). These projects are:

- Fluid master research
- Supply interruption webpage testing.
- Water hall tests
- Post incident research.
- Vulnerable strategy research

- 2023/2024 brand tracking
- State of the nation

SB took the group through an update about CCW's emerging research priorities. These include research into tap water quality/safety, water companies' financial stability, clarifying responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the pipe network and customers views about water smart meters in the context of their experience with energy smart meters.

SB also took the sub group through the latest CCW, OFWAT and Experian research projects and findings.

5. PR24 Business Plan update

Ben Nadel (BN) explained to the sub group the latest Business Plan update. BN advised that UU is currently working with the Environment Agency and DEFRA about the implications of its Business Plan investment proposals. UU is also working with Local Government colleagues to explain the scale of the investment plan and to look at ways to coordinate future investment and maintenance works.

UU is responding to OFWAT enquiries about its AMP8 business plan and supporting information. OFWAT have firmed up the date for the interim regulatory announcement (June 2024). UU will have 6 weeks to respond to this interim announcement before OFWAT issue the final determination in December 2024.

BN advised that CCW would be conducting further nationwide Affordability and Acceptability research. This should produce regional information that is of use to each water company. Water companies and ICG's are unlikely to be involved in this research.

Q. TA asked about the proposed Local Government collaboration given the financial pressures that sector is under.

A. BN advised that the ask of Local Government is not about financial contributions, but rather about joint working and support for community engagement.

BN stated that the regulator is also due to confirm its review of ICG's in February 2024.

BL stated that she is due to attend a briefing about the ICG report on 26 February 2024.

Sub group members stated that the ICG review will have a number of challenging issues to address as there is a wide regional variation in how groups work.

SC also stated that the pending general election may have implications for the price review alongside the future of regulators across a range of regulated sectors. Central Government is currently conducting a review of all regulators, including OFWAT.

6. Five County Engagement

Shy Bayly (SB) explained that UU is looking to build upon the momentum of the Your Water Your Say sessions and the new Five County delivery team structure. The purpose of this agenda item is to set out, for consultation, a range of county-based engagement proposals that UU is working upon. These are in addition to existing engagement and research activities. Other Your Voice sub groups have considered this agenda item.

Q. TA asked for clarification about the difference between the proposed engagement events (1. Broadcast engagement events, 2. Stakeholder and community events, 3. Thematic broadcast events).

A. SB explained that Broadcast engagement events would be similar to Your Water Your Say. Stakeholder & community events would target specific stakeholders and focus on specific themes and collaborative problem solving. Thematic events would entail in-depth work on designated topics. These engagement activities would be on a county basis.

Q. TA stated that its important to ensure that there is an engagement event code of conduct to make clear to participants what is acceptable standards of behaviour.

A. SB stated that it is important to set out clear expectations and that the chair has a key role to play in ensuring compliance and good quality debate.

Q. BL advised that the previous Your Water Your Say generated significant amounts of follow up work and on-site meetings, especially for the Executive Team. Whilst the previous sessions tried to follow structured discussion topics, customers wanted to focus on their specific areas of concerns. BL also advised that UU should ensure that it exploits existing stakeholder structures to avoid “re-inventing the wheel.”

Q. LB suggested a hybrid meeting format (surgeries) whereby UU colleagues could pre-filter customers concerns. SC agreed that the surgery style approach has its merits as a way of avoiding meetings being dominated by specific customer issues.

A. SB agreed to take these comments on board.

Q. TA asked if customers are bringing their concerns to the Your Water Your Say sessions, that this pointed to a systemic weakness in UU’s decision making processes. Is there a way to give customers access/pathways to decision makers at an earlier stage in the process.

A. SB stated that the new County based delivery teams are a new way to develop these types of communication pathways. Some of the issues raised at the Your Water Your Say events did tend to be complicated in nature and involved more than just UU. SB also advised that UU is looking to ensure that some of the positive investment stories (jobs, training, environment) form part of these future engagement meetings.

Q. BL agreed that the positive elements of the business plan investment proposals need to be highlighted, especially with key stakeholders. As an example, ENW invite key stakeholders to engage with its investment plans. This could be an opportunity for UU.

Q.LB suggested that the 15–20-minute company overview might be too extensive and could end up unconstructive.

A. SB advised that UU are considering more bite size chunks of information before moving into discussions.

Q. SC also suggested investigating a model that is used in the Local Government sector. That model involves holding meetings in public in front of a controlled audience. This is a different model to open public meetings.

Q. TA suggested the Five County events would be enhanced if there were senior decision makers in attendance. BL also asked how customers would get to know about their local county delivery team. BL and TA asked if referrals to the county teams would represent a form of escalation from the service centre.

A. SB stated that the county delivery teams are still in their infancy and their methods of operation and related communications are still being developed.

Q, BL, and TA suggested that the engagement sessions would benefit from an independent chair. There is a risk that an internal UU chair would not be seen as neutral.

7. AOB

No further business. Date of next meeting: 12 April 2024 (14.00 – 16.00)