

Your Voice
Customer Affordability & Vulnerability Panel

14 January 2025

Minutes

1. Present:

Dave Thompson, Bernice Law, Peter Fitzhenry, Richard Inman, Amber Cairns, Stephanie Smith, Simone Mansbridge. Paul Morris, David Burdis, Leanne Merga, Tracey Bennett

2. Apologies:

Mike Gauterin, David Tai, Luke Pilot, Jason Bromley, Chris Jones, Michelle Atkinson, Steve Cullen, George Oldbury. Helen Handzel, Jo Woodcock, Jackie Cassidy., Daniel Barr, Karen Swindon, Paul Morris, Karen Savage

	Issues
a)	<p>Action Update The Panel agreed to update the action log as there are a number of completed actions arising from this meeting. The associated activities are attached in the latest version of the action log. (January 2025)</p>
b)	<p>New Water Bill April 2025 Amber Cairns (AC) provided the Panel with an update around Ofwat’s final determination, the related customer bill communications strategy, and the proposed related affordability packages. Highlights included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofwat has confirmed that UU’s support package is sector leading. • There will be an increase in customers qualifying for bill support from 5% to 15% of customers. • There are new support schemes coming on stream from April 2025. • Alongside support for existing employment, UU and its partners are looking to create seven thousand new jobs across the life of the business plan. • UU is planning to provide a £50 bill discount to around 250,000 customers. <p>Q. Dave Thompson (DT) asked if UU could share the web link about the new job opportunities. A. AC agreed to share this information link. (Action).</p>

Q. DT offered to support UU's efforts to make its bill information communications more inclusive and accessible.

A. AC accepted this offer of support **(Action)**.

Q. DT asked if UU would like support agencies to make customer referrals for the affordability schemes.

A. AC advised that this would be useful after the April 2025 when the affordability packages will be rolled out to new and existing customers. There is an online application form.

Q. DT and Dave Burdis (DB) and Bernice Law (BL) asked if the new £50 scheme was open to owner occupiers and private tenants.

A. AC advised that the scheme was initially targeted at social housing tenants. If resources allow, then this £50 scheme will be rolled out further.

Q. The Panel expressed some concern regarding the restrictive, tenure based £50 support scheme as focusing on social housing tenants could throw up significant anomalies. The Panel asked UU to reflect on this challenge and DT suggested that DB and Steve Cullen (SC) work up specific case studies that highlight the support needs of low-income owner occupiers and private tenants. **(Action)**.

Q. BL asked how the selection scheme criteria was worked up and if there had been any consultation or engagement around the decision to select social housing tenants over and above the needs of owner occupiers and private tenants.

A. AC agreed to share the relevant decision-making information. **(Action)**.

<p>c)</p>	<p>Customer Vulnerability Update.</p> <p>Steph Smith (SS) took the group through a presentation highlighting UU’s work to support the North West’s vulnerable customer base. SS highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The growth in vulnerable customers on the Priority Services Register. • Preparations commencing for the next ISO assessment in 2025. • That UU is on track for its target for Priority Services Registration. Currently the register stands at 518,562. • Around 15% of North West Households are on the register. The target for 2030 is 20% of Households. • Data sharing and partnership working is key to increasing household registered. • Customer engagement events and activities. • Flooding support for customers. • UU is planning to recruit two social workers to support its plans to work with vulnerable customers. <p>Q. Dave Thompson (DT) asking if UU could invite some of the charities it works with to join the A&V Panel.</p> <p>A. SS agreed to investigate this opportunity. (Action).</p> <p>Q. DT offered to put SS in contact with WMBC’s Director of Social Services to help UU have access to ADAS. ADAS is a group of North West Directors of Social Services. (Action).</p>
<p>d)</p>	<p>Cost of Living update (Ofwat cost of living research & Experian’s Quarter 2 Affordability update)</p> <p>Unfortunately, the item presenter is unwell and is not in a position to deliver this session today. The item has been deferred to our next Panel meeting.</p>
<p>e)</p>	<p>Panel members update.</p> <p>DB advised that Salford Welfare Rights remain remarkably busy and there does not appear any let up in the cost-of-living crisis. This is at a time when Local Authority resources remain stretched.</p> <p>Richard Ingram (RI) advised that his organisation is focusing on the recent reduction in resources targeted at rural areas.</p> <p>Paul Morris (PM) advised that ENW is working to build its initiative-taking capacity by developing a Resilience Forum alongside its strategic partners. ENW is assessing</p>

	<p>its new approach within the Wigan MBC area. This follows on from six major incidents in the recent few months.</p> <p>Leanne Merga (LM) advised that Stockport Housing is working with the DWP to complete the managed Universal Credit migration of legacy benefit claimants.</p> <p>DT advised that at a time when there are further proposed cuts to disability benefits, WDP is working with a range of local partners, including CAB on a poverty conference and DT will discuss further with SS/AC. (Action).</p>
<p>f)</p>	<p>AOB</p> <p>BL reminded the Panel that UU’s board is due to consider Ofwat’s final determination in the next week. UU (and other water companies) will then be under the spotlight to ensure it/they deliver the investment programme.</p> <p>AC advised that UU’s Affordability Conference will be held on 20 March 2025 at the Village Hotel Warrington.</p> <p>SS advised that the Vulnerability Conference is likely to be held in July 2025.</p>
<p>g)</p>	<p>DONM</p> <p>14 April 2025 (10-12) – to be confirmed</p>