

Your Voice Customer Engagement Subgroup

12 April 2024

Minutes

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

1. 2 February 2024 Minutes and Challenge Log

- UU to invite YV to any workshop about Smart Meters (ongoing)
- New customer licence conditions (April 2024 agenda item)
- Vulnerable customer support (April 2024 agenda item)
- Regional profile v PS customer database (April 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.

Dave Thompson (DT) welcomed the positive news around the increasing take up of Priority Services.

Tayo Adebawale (TA) asked how UU is seeking to go beyond OWAT's service traditional guidance. And also, how UU are seeking to compare its performance beyond the water sector.

MG advised that UU is a strong presence at the national Customer Service organisation and that UU continues to look outwards to learn from best practise across a range of service sectors outside the water industry.

3. Customer License Condition

Ben Nadel (BN) explained about OFWAT's plans to address a perceived gap in its regulatory powers around ensuring the sector's compliance with good customer service. These powers will be based in general principles rather than specific directions and is designed to give companies discretion about how they achieve compliance.

UU has completed a review of OFWAT's principles of good customer service and can evidence significant levels of compliance. There are a few areas that require further attention including responses to external flooding events and working with property owners

in the event of water leaks within the curtilage of the property. UU see OFWAT's customer license priorities as a minimum and the company aspires to exceed these standards.

Q. TA asked about the volume of water loss that is the customers responsibility.

A. BN confirmed that its 25% of all water leaks across the sector, and 13% in the North West.

Q. DT suggested that case studies are a good way of explaining policies to customers as opposed to "dry" policy documents.

A. Ben Nadel (BN) advised that the guidance places a responsibility on the water companies to ensure that information is understandable and goes beyond putting legal type documents on a website. BN will filter this advice into UU's license responses.

Q. DT offer to support UU's work that seeks to support its vulnerable customers.

A. MG agreed to take this away and to consider how to make best use of this offer. **(Action)**.

4. Customer Research Update

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

These projects are:

- Fluid master research
- Supply interruption webpage testing.
- Billing design options
- Employee trial – rising block tariff
- Water Hall tests
- Water quality communication testing
- Post incident research
- 2023/2024 brand tracking
- State of the nation

SB took the group through an overview of the latest Experian research looking at the impact of inflation on customers income, growing vulnerability in some consumer segments and the impact of rising mortgages on affordability. BN advised that these negative changes are affecting the North West more than most other regions. OFWAT/CCW are also sharing their research findings from a major incident in another region.

Q. Bernice Law (BL) advised that customers involved with the webpage testing do not seem to like the "up my street" terminology.

A. SB stated that the level of acceptance seemed to vary with how familiar customers are with the webpage system.

Q. DT asked if UU needed input from visually impaired customers. If so, DT's colleagues from WDP would be prepared to help.

A. SB promised to pass this offer on to Matt who is leading on this project. **(Action)**.

Q. DT asked if the webpages include information about what customers can expect from UU.

A. SB advised that the site includes a full FAQ section plus a direct link to Priority Services.

Q. TA expressed interest in the Innovation Lab and asked for more information to be shared with Your Voice's sub groups, especially around the issue of how UU is including the Design Council's best design principles into its research and new systems.

A.SB agreed to arrange for a colleague to present to Your Voice. (Action).

5. Customer Vulnerability Strategy

Jemma Houghton (JH) is UU's Priority Services Manager and took the group through an presentation on its Vulnerability Strategy. This presentation highlighted:

- UU's customer base
- Understanding customers – training for colleagues
- The County Business model
- UU's regional partnership approach
- Where are the gaps in terms of regional geography.

Q. TA asked how UU goes about capturing information about wider social group or issues.

A. JH advised that there are gaps in the current database and UU is working to close this by sharing information with other trusted partners such as housing associations or other utilities or local councils. UU's work to get closer to local communities is another way it is seeking to capture granular information about customer's needs.

Q. DT shared information about how support organisations are seeking to redefine labels as a means to reducing stigma and encouraging take up of services. SC agreed and outlined the work support agencies are doing to assist UU in its plans for helping vulnerable customers,

6. PR24 Business Plan update

Ben Nadel (BN) explained the latest Business Plan update and advised that at the end of March 2024, OFWAT had asked all water companies to revise some data tables.

The Draft Determination is scheduled for 12 June 2024. SB advised that OFWAT/CCW will be conducting customer acceptability and affordability research post 12 June 2024. UU's only involvement will be to supply customer details. There is no further information about the proposed nationwide 'Your Water Your Say' session for England. The Final Determination is scheduled for December 2024. OFWAT has been working up a set of rules around uncertainty mechanisms that offer companies some flexibility when dealing with "unknow unknowns."

7. Five County Engagement

Shy Bayly (SB) explained that UU's plans for its county level delivery squads continues to develop such as two county engagement sessions per annum. UU has accepted YourVoice's suggestion for an independent chair and for a panel to deal with specific customer enquiries to ensure that the sessions flow and achieve their overall objective. UU is working with a Youth representative to set up a youth focus group to capture future bill payers views.

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

8. AOB

No further business. Date of next meeting: 20 September 2024 (14.00 – 16.00)