

Your Voice Customer Engagement Subgroup

12 December 2024

Minutes

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

1. September 2024 Minutes and Challenge Log

- The Sub Group asked for an Annual Innovation update report (scheduled September 2025 meeting)
- A Sub Group Member asked UU to explain to customers why its new investment proposals were not undertaken in previous AMPs. UU agreed to consider this as part of its future customer comms.
- A Sub Group Member challenged why UU limited the financial resources available for lead pipe replacement. UU advised that lead pipe replacement investment is capped and that it was seeking extra resources in the next AMP. More details will be available after 19 December 2024.

2. ODI Quarterly performance update: customer indicators

Mike Gauterin (MG) took the Sub Group through the latest quarterly performance information. Overall, MG reported a stable performance position, whilst highlighting specific measures that remain a challenge.

Ben Nadel (BN) explained the impact that Covid-19 had had on UU's PCC measure performance. As citizens worked from home or stayed home, water usage switched from non-household to household consumption. The regulator has considered the water industry's Covid case with regards PCC.

Q. Dave Thompson (DT) suggested that the North West's high number of people with disabilities (with related higher levels of water consumption) could be a factor affecting the levels of water consumption.

A. BN stated that UU currently does not measure this factor but that he would raise this with the relevant team **(Action)**.

A. BN mentioned that the existing PCC ODI measure is based primarily on company year by year performance. Long term targets will see all water companies evaluated against a national performance figure of 110 litres per household by 2050.

Q. DT welcomed UU's water industry leading Priority Service Register work. DT challenged UU to learn from other energy sectors and utilities. **(Action)**.

A. MG advised that other utilities are performing at higher levels of Priority Services registration than the water sector. As such UU is working with other North West utilities to build strong PSR partnerships, joint working, and data sharing.

3. Communicating Water Bill increases

Following previous Sub Group challenges about how UU can ensure effective Bill communications, Mike Gauterin (MG) took the Sub Group through UU's approach to explain any future water bill increases. The approach is based in a number of drivers:

- Non metered customer correspondence
- Metered customer correspondence
- Website refresh
- County level communications
- Taking insight from customer insight specialists
- A partnership with The Money & Mental Health Policy Institute (linked to Martin Lewis)
- A strong emphasis on the support that will be available to customers.

The Determination decision is still expected on 19 December 2024, and this will determine customer bills from April 2025.

4. CCW Draft Determination Research

Ben Nadel (BN) provided an update about CCW's draft determinations research findings, which explored:

- household customers' views about the regulator's bill proposals; and
- changes to water bills and future investment plans.

BN provided a comparison between CCW's findings and UU's customer research findings.

Q. DT asked about any water bill and investment trends specific to PSR customers.

A. BN advised that there was nothing specific within CCW research in relation to PSR customers. Shy Bayley (SB) confirmed that UU did provide CCW with a demographic breakdown of the North West.

Q. Steve Cullen (SC) asked if there are any surprises within the CCW research findings.

A. BN advised that there was nothing new in CCW's research findings compared to UU's own research results. There is a general recognition that water customers are nervous about the impact of any resulting bill increase.

5. Regulatory Updates

Ben Nadel (BN) took the Sub Group through an update about events within the water regulatory environment. CCW had recently published Water Mark, its annual performance rating report. The main water sector regulatory issue is DEFRA's Special Measures Bill and Consumer Engagement proposals.

The main customer engagement proposal is to complement the existing ICG engagement structure with seventeen CCW-led regional Consumer Panels. These Panels would take the form of an online annual meeting, consisting of 50-75 consumers. They would have regulatory status and would hold regional water companies to account, with the process similar to UU's Your Water Your Say engagement process.

Bernice Law (BL) confirmed the ICG Chair's group is inputting into these Consumer Panel proposals and that the Chair's group is meeting OFWAT in February 2025 to discuss further.

Q, SC agreed that these proposals are a useful complement to the existing ICG engagement structures.

A.SB advised that the Consumer Engagement Panels are intended to reflect national water issues and that there needs to be more consideration to local and regional consumer concerns. BN advised that CCW needs to provide more information about how water companies are expected to collaborate with these proposals. OFWAT and CCW are planning consumer engagement workshops in March 2025 to clarify their thinking.

Q. DT asked if there are plans to make this consumer engagement a multi layered consultation approach or will it just be an online system?

A. BN advised that OFWAT/CCW are only planning for online consumer engagement. UU has raised this narrow approach as an area of concern with the regulators.

6. Customer Research update

Jenny Fathers (JF) took the group through a presentation about the current customer research programme. This presentation highlighted:

- UU's eight pieces of customer research at various stages of completion
- State of the Nation survey Wave 9 findings
- Water Tanker Webpage Testing
- Ofwat's Cost of Living Research (Wave 6)
- Experian's Quarter 2 Affordability Update
- CCW's Testing the Waters Report

Q. BL asked for a copy of the water tanker website and if the lead pipe page is available.

A. JF confirmed that this water tanker page is freely available on UU's website and that its information is linked to the UpMyStreet website. JF agreed to send BL the lead pipe page. **(Action).**

Q. BL asked who funds the retail users water efficiency works (non-domestic households).

A. BN advised that whilst water wholesalers have a water efficiency remit, ultimately water companies are judged on overall water consumption (PCC) and therefore many water companies are working in partnership with water wholesalers to engage with water retail users.

7. AOB

No further business. Date of next meeting: 20 March 2025 (10.00 – 12.00)