

YourVoice

Reflecting on United Utilities' performance – 2016-2017

Over the last year we, the YourVoice panel, have continued to work with United Utilities to make sure it delivers water and wastewater services which reflect the priorities of customers and stakeholders across the North West.

We have two roles during the 2015-2020 business plan investment period. Firstly, to challenge United Utilities to deliver against the promises it made to customers and stakeholders in its business plan and to assess its progress against its performance commitments. Secondly, to challenge United Utilities in preparing the business plan for 2020-2025 and to make sure this is built from a thorough understanding of customer and stakeholder needs. We feel that this is good governance practice, and involves direct contact with United Utilities' board.

Every three months throughout 2016-2017, we have received and reviewed progress reports from United Utilities against its customer promises, and the performance commitments for customers that those promises are based on. We have also emphasised how important it is for all those who live and work in the North West to be able to easily understand how their company is performing.

Our panel's representatives include independent customer and business representatives and quality and environmental regulators. Our panel has been further strengthened this year by the addition of representatives from Citizens Advice, Money Advice and the Warrington Disability Partnership. We needed support in these areas and the new members have picked up issues very quickly and made a meaningful contribution to our work.

We are pleased to report that United Utilities' 2016/2017 Annual Performance Report accurately reflects its performance. We are also pleased that the company is continuing to produce an easy-to-read performance summary, which has gained Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark, and that there will be some extra online content to provide a more modern digital presentation of the information to help to improve customers' and stakeholders' understanding.

United Utilities' performance this year has positives and negatives which have affected the day-to-day lives of the people in the North West. We have challenged the company to focus on making improvements where it has not met its targets, for example in the area of water quality where the company has carried out extra mains-cleaning programmes to get rid of the discolouration that some customers experienced in their water supply. We also saw that the company has acted on lessons learnt from water-quality issues experienced in 2015/2016.

The overall result is a financial reward through the outcome delivery incentives that the company agreed with Ofwat for this five-year period. This is good for customers as it means the company is delivering benefits overall.

As well as examining United Utilities' performance every three months, we have monitored, reported on and assured stakeholders about many aspects of the company's performance during the year. We have done this by using subgroups to look at the main issues we are responsible for in areas of involving customers, the environment, engineering solutions and a 2025 business plan writing group. We have also added new members to the subgroups to provide support as the work on the price review increases.

We have been closely involved in working with customers in preparing for the next price review. Many of our members have attended training courses provided by Ofwat, Consumer Council for Water and others to make sure we are well placed to carry out our work and pick up best practice.

We are working with and challenging the company on its customer engagement strategy and practice and the need to link this to the real-time information it holds on customers' issues, complaints and compliments. Some of this work is innovative, very inclusive and should really involve customers.

Overall, we feel that over recent years customers have become much better informed and more willing to challenge and demand improvements in service. We are working with United Utilities to provide education and extra information to customers on areas of the company's work, and we will make sure that United Utilities' plans effectively reflect customers' feedback.

We have continued to be involved as United Utilities has developed its customer strategy, particularly in its approach to making sure that all customers receive appropriate support, depending on their needs. This includes vulnerable customers. The successful take-up of 'Priority Services' in the year means that more people are now receiving tailored help, which is a welcome development. The new affordability and vulnerability subgroup (which is chaired by disability champion, David Thompson, who is also a member of YourVoice) gives us a direct link to this section of our community, and we are sure this will prove invaluable.

We realise the challenging set of outcomes that United Utilities must deliver by 2020 will be difficult to achieve. However, we will be focused on monitoring and challenging the company to deliver these targets to benefit its customers.

If you would like to contact us about United Utilities' performance or our work, please email us at myview@uuplc.co.uk.

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