

United Utilities Charges and Billing Webpage Testing

Report August 2025



Background and Approach



Research background and approach



Background

United Utilities has recently updated areas on their website that contain pages on the topic of charges and billing, with the aim of improving customer experiences during the main billing period



Objectives

The research sought to answer the following objectives:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the updated billing and charges webpages
- Examine the full user journey when navigating the webpages
- Identify pain points and barriers
- Deliver actionable insights highlighting usability issues and customer feedback on further improvements



Approach

A mixed method approach combining a quantitative 1000-customer survey, heat mapping and qualitative user testing, with seven participants, was used to explore the full customer journey.

Fieldwork took place from 7th July to 24th July 2025, with participants recruited from the 'In the Flow' panel and from an external access panel.



Data

Data has been weighted to be representative of the United Utilities customer base.

Details of the sample can be found in the appendix.

Context

The following events happened before or during fieldwork and may have influenced customers' answers

Key events across the Water Sector over the last 6 months:

January: Continuing media coverage of bill increases across both regional and national outlets, as well as coverage of increasing dividends.

February: Several water companies set intentions for delivering AMP8 plans including investment, recruitment and procurement. Louise Beardmore attends EFRA Committee.

March: River campaigners to sue Ofwat over water bill rises. Thames Water awaits decision on £3bn deal with creditors and secure its future.

April: National coverage of 'Awful April' where bills including water, are set to rise. Scottish Water strike in pay row. Announcement that water bosses could face jail time for illegal sewage spills.

May: Dry weather experienced across the UK, United Utilities warning to public after driest start to the year since 1956. Coverage of increasing profits during time of increased bills.

June: Dry weather continues. Thames Water debt rescue deal falls through. Some bonuses for water bosses banned.

Early July: Dry weather continues, Yorkshire Water and Thames Water announce hosepipe ban. UU recognised in the Sunday Times Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers.

Outside of the Water Sector:



Continuing cost of living crisis, with rising bills and inflation



Climate change impact evident across the world



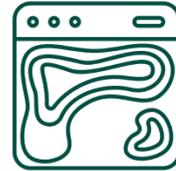
Severe weather events including flash flooding



Labour government in power, with introduction of new policies

Methodology and analysis

Heatmapping



Customers were invited to use heatmapping to click on areas of the webpage they particularly liked and disliked, with open-responses to provide reasoning.

The heatmap was analysed based on volume of clicks in specific areas and the open responses were examined in correspondence to location.

Qualitative open-response questions



Following each series of scaled questions customers were invited to respond to open-ended questions allowing them to share any insight they personally feel valuable.

This approach enriched the dataset, looking beyond quantitative measures and gaining nuanced perspectives.

Quantified scale questions



Customers were asked a series of scaled questions to determine their attitude towards certain aspects of the webpage including, language, tone etc.

The data was analysed quantitatively, to assign measurable values to customer feedback and allow for clear identification of trends.

Screen-recorded navigation



7 members of the online community were invited to participate in UX testing during which they virtually record their navigation through the webpage, narrating their thoughts throughout in real time.

The recordings were analysed based on both the users' navigational paths and their verbal commentary, offering valuable insights into their decision-making processes.

Charges and billing webpage survey – Applied routes

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two test routes, each focused on a different section of the website. Route A explored the 'Our Household Charges 2025/2026' page, while Route B focused on the 'Understanding Your Bill' page.

Within each route, all participants were shown the same page content structure. However, the specific information presented was tailored based on their metered or unmetered status, ensuring that each user saw content relevant to their circumstances. This approach allowed for consistent testing of each page while maintaining contextual accuracy for individual users.

Key Findings



Key Findings



- Route A ('Our Household Charges 2025/26') had mixed feedback, with some users finding it informative and clear, while others cited overloaded sections, small fonts, and overly technical language.
- Route B ('Understanding Your Bill') was better received overall than Route A. It consistently scored higher across language clarity, tone, and layout, and was seen as more customer-friendly (mean score 4.21 compared to Route A's 3.83)
- Generally, customers valued clear, plain language, concise layout, and practical visuals, but found technical jargon, cluttered sections, and inconsistent formatting challenging.
- Users appreciated clarity, bill breakdowns, and practical advice, especially for managing costs. Criticism focused on lack of trust, poor accessibility (small fonts, jargon), and cold or technical tone in certain areas.
- Both metered and unmetered groups showed low confidence in charges and wanted greater transparency. Metered users particularly valued tools and comparisons, but disliked jargon and layout, whereas unmetered users often sought clearer explanations and were sceptical about the benefits of metering.

Route A



Our household charges – Banner feedback findings

Heatmap analysis

- Respondents generally found the banner **clear and easy to read**, with good visuals allowing for ease of understanding of the information included.
- One drawback was the language could be **difficult to read**, due to the **font size used on the page**, though this was **cited by far fewer respondents in comparison to the positive responses**.
- 230 respondents mentioned aspects that they 'liked', compared to 71 who 'disliked' aspects.

Analysis of scores

- When exploring the quantitative scores of the banner feedback for Our household charges 2025/2026, mean scores **were high, with all scoring above a 4 out of 5, indicating strong agreement**.
- The highest score was shown for the **'the language is easy to understand', scoring 4.3**, followed by 'the tone of language is 'just right', 4.2 and 'the information provides the right level of context to what I can find on the webpage', 4.1.
- The banner was received positively by respondents. **The statement 'The language is easy to understand' achieved the highest NET agreement rate at 83%, followed by 'The tone of the language' at 80%, and 'The right level of context' at 79%.**

Our household charges 2025/2026 – Services you pay for feedback

Metered and unmetered customers



Our household charges – Services you pay for findings

Heatmap analysis

- Similar feedback as seen previously was noted in response to this section, with **respondents describing the ease of understanding, the appealing and easy to understand, concise information on the page**. Contrastingly, several respondents drew attention to the **image not matching up with the text included, suggesting the use of another image, or better placement of the image used**.
- Additionally, one respondent suggested that the information detailed did not include enough information on the standing charge.
- **Overall, 315 respondents 'liked' aspects within the heatmap, compared to 124 who 'disliked' parts of the heatmap.**

Analysis of scores

- **In examining scores, the highest agreement was with the language being easy to understand, scoring 4.3 out of 5, indicating a high level of agreement with the statement.**
- All other scores were above 4, aside from 'it gives me confidence in the charges I pay to United Utilities for my water and sewerage services, which scored 3.8 out of 5 overall.
- **This highlights an area of improvement and key finding for United Utilities, whereby more detail could be included to explain charges detailed in the section and encourage confidence.**

Our household charges 2025/2026 – Metered charges 2025/2026

Metered customers



Our household charges – Metered charges findings

Heatmap analysis

- Certain respondents appreciated the use of volume of water to explain usage in the section, though others identified issues with the term 'volumetric', identifying this as an area of confusion. **This section saw 112 likes and 22 dislikes.**
- In terms of the changes to metered bills, **respondents highlighted the breakdown of bills as helpful and easy to understand, but other respondents wanted additional information on why water costs had increased, and how calculations were made.** This section saw 151 likes and 86 dislikes.
- For what this means for you and your bill, respondents again noted **the ease of understanding due to the breakdown of information for clear understanding, yet wanted additional explanations for certain terms, such as 'typical', suggesting that there may need to be more information available to customers on what this means.** This page had 124 likes and 97 dislikes.
- **The 'how can I reduce my bills' page was found to draw customer attention to the page, leading to 126 likes.** Contrastingly, of the 30 dislikes, respondents argued that **the tone and language could be deemed patronising when advising customers on using less water.**
- On 'how can I track my usage', respondents suggested that the information was again **clear, concise and easy to understand**, which led to 142 likes. On the other hand, of the 26 dislikes, **it was argued that the information may seem boring or daunting to customers.**

Analysis of scores

- As seen previously, and as noted in heatmap analysis, **it was found that the language used was easy to understand, with a mean score of 4.3.**
- All other aspects scored higher than a 4, **aside from the webpage giving respondents confidence in the charges they pay to United Utilities, which scored 3.9.**
- **A key finding in this area was that more could be done to encourage confidence in what charges are for, how they are broken down and what it means for customers.**
- **12% of respondents found that there was information missing from the page**, which was found to be: a breakdown of profits and spending, explanations of increased charges and more information on pricing.
- In terms of improvements to this section, respondents suggested: **simplifying the information included, reducing bills as a whole and including visual aids to support understanding.**

Our household charges 2025/2026 – Unmetered charges 2025/2026

Unmetered customers



Our household charges – Unmetered charges findings

Heatmap analysis

- **Scores were less positive for unmetered customers in terms of heatmaps**, with 38 likes and 32 dislikes given to the first page, charges explained. Similar trends were evidenced in the next heatmap, with 'how household bills without a meter changing' webpage receiving 73 likes and 60 dislikes.
- Scores were generally more positive on the 'Can I change the way my bills are calculated' heatmap, with 50 likes compared to 20 dislikes, highlighting a greater sense of positivity towards this page. **For example, 'of changes for households without water meters', the heatmap had 59 likes compared to 33 dislikes**, again showing greater dissatisfaction with the page amongst unmetered customers.
- The final heatmap had a far more positive response, **with 134 likes compared to 26 dislikes, citing the clarity of the section and support for a valuable service on offer, indicating this page as the most satisfactory according to unmetered customers.**
- **Overall, unmetered customers were less satisfied across the board with webpages compared to metered customers, as shown in the breakdown of likes and dislikes within each heatmap.**

Analysis of scores

- **NET agreement scores were notably lower compared to information for metered customers.** Nevertheless, the layout and language continued to perform well, **receiving the highest NET agreement scores at 74% and 72%, respectively.**
- **The statement 'It gives me confidence in the charge I pay to United Utilities for my water and sewerage services' recorded the highest NET disagreement score at 23%.**
- This was followed by 'It provides the appropriate answers to questions to understand household charges / if I wanted to understand household charges', which received a NET disagreement score of 10%.
- **A lower proportion of unmetered respondents indicated that there was no content missing from the webpage, compared to metered respondents, with 68% of unmetered and 70% of metered, respectively.**

Our household charges 2025/2026 – Why are bills going up?

Metered customers



Our household charges – Why are bills going up?

findings

Heatmap analysis

- Respondents were shown the 'Why are bills going up?' section of the webpage and asked to click on parts they liked or disliked and describe what about that specific area they liked or disliked. **195 respondents noted aspects they liked**, compared to **91 who mentioned aspects they disliked**. Themes again referenced the **clarity of language** and **ease of understanding**, with **suggestions for change being the small print and over complicated volume of text**.
- A key finding of the heatmaps was the **ease of understanding the information**, which outweighs the smaller volume of comments which explain other themes such as **too much information, small printed text, daunting information or a lack of explanation of the information included**.

Analysis of scores

- Trends seen in previous pages continued in this Route, with the **language being easy to understand again scored highest amongst respondents (4.1)**, and the information giving **respondents confidence again the lowest (3.6)**.
- 77% of respondents expressed NET agreement that the language used is easy to understand, followed by 74% who agreed that the layout made it easy to access relevant information. **The lowest NET agreement rate was recorded for the statement regarding confidence in the charge paid to United Utilities, at 58%**.

Our household charges 2025/26 – Overall webpage feedback



Our household charges – Overall webpage feedback findings

Analysis of scores

- In examining scores for the overall webpage for 'Our household charges 2025/2026', respondents expressed a positive view of the whole 'Our household charges for 2025/26' webpage in Route A, **with over 70% NET agreement that the language is easy to understand (75%), the tone is appropriate (74%), the layout facilitates easy access to relevant information (74%),** and the webpage provides an appropriate level of detail to support understanding of household charges (70%).
- **The highest level of NET disagreement was with the statement that the webpage gives respondents confidence in the charges they pay to United Utilities (17%).** This was a common theme throughout Route A, with respondents scoring this lowest of all mean scores once again (3.7 out of 5).

Customer friendly webpage

- When asked how customer friendly respondents thought the Overall webpage feedback page was, the largest percentage of votes went to 4 out of 5, indicating largely friendly scores. **A mean score of 3.8 out of 5 was recorded.**
- In addition, a NET score of 68% of respondents felt that the webpage is customer friendly, a NET of 9% felt it was not customer friendly, while 22% felt neutral and 1% was unsure.

Route A

Is your water bill higher than expected? –

Feedback

Metered customers



Is your water bill higher than expected– UX testing metered feedback findings

Analysis of scores

- Similar to the survey, **UX testing respondents who have a water meter reacted positively to the webpage.** Respondents particularly praised the **clarity of information, layout, and smooth navigation.**
- **81% of respondents who took part in this part of the research expressed NET agreement that the language was easy to understand** and that the layout made it easy to access relevant information, continuing the ongoing theme throughout the research that the information detailed was largely easy to understand and accessible.
- The lowest score given by UX testing respondents referred to the webpage giving them confidence in the next steps they needed to take (3.3) and 75% of respondents answering neutrally to this question. **This was a key theme throughout analysis of each aspect of the research.**
- Metered UX testing respondents scored highest on the **tone of language on the webpage being just right**, scoring 4.3 mean score and 100% of respondents scoring a 4 or 5 in agreement.
- In terms of improvements, **metered UX testing participants noted issues with the organisation and formatting of some information.** UX testing respondents also highlighted **specific concerns around navigation options and the content and clarity of graphics**, which were seen as **areas needing improvement.**

Route A

Is your water bill higher than expected? – Feedback

Unmetered customers



Is your water bill higher than expected– UX testing unmetered feedback findings

Analysis of scores

- When respondents were asked to share their initial thoughts on the 'Is your water bill higher than expected?' webpage, **feelings were generally positive. 14% found the page informative; 12% found it easy to understand; 9% found the page easy to navigate – and 9% expressed negative feelings, a higher proportion compared to metered customers.**
- **UX testing unmetered respondents reacted positively to the webpage.** Respondents expressed that they liked the clear layout, easy-to-understand content, and smooth navigation.
- Responses to the 'Is your water bill higher than expected?' webpage, followed a similar pattern to those of metered customers. The language and layout received the **highest NET agreement scores with 69%; however, these were lower on average than those from metered customers.**
- **NET disagreement scores were higher among unmetered customers,** with the highest recorded for the **statement 'The webpage gives me confidence in the charges I pay to United Utilities,' at 21%. This continues a trend throughout findings.**
- As seen previously, the **highest scores were shown for the language being easy to understand** , with 100% of respondents agreeing with this statement. Conversely, the lowest score amongst unmetered UX respondents was for the layout of the webpage making it easy to access relevant information (4 out of 5).
- **53% of unmetered UX respondents suggested that there was nothing that could be improved,** whereas 7% suggested improvements to formatting, 5% requested more transparency on billing increases and 3% suggested it could be more user friendly.
- **Final comments from unmetered UX respondents identified that the information could be better organised, with reduced text in boxes, alternative colours and making information easier to find.**

Route B



Understanding your bill – feedback



Understanding your bill – Route B feedback

Heatmap analysis

- When respondents in Route B were shown the 'Understanding your bill' section of the webpage, scores were generally positive with **387 likes given to the webpage**, citing ease of information and helpful images. In comparison, **there were 60 dislikes given to the page by Route B respondents, citing unfriendly language**. Softening this language would be beneficial in helping increase acceptance with respondents.

Analysis of scores

- In examination of scores for agreement with statements, **scores were generally high across all four statements, with each scoring 4.4 or 4.3 out of 5. At least 80% percent of respondents expressed NET agreement across all statements, with the highest of 88% in NET agreement regarding both the language and layout.** The lowest NET agreement score was recorded for the statement **'The information provides the right level of context to what I can find on the webpage,'** at 84%.

Metered bills explained – feedback

Metered customers



Metered bills explained– Route B feedback

Analysis of scores

- Similar trends were seen in the Metered Bills explained section of Route B respondents, with 257 likes given to the heatmap, compared to only 39 dislikes. **Likes tended to reference colours and details, with dislikes referring to the layout of the page.** This trend continued across each of the heatmaps in this section, **with far more respondents recording likes than dislikes.**
- In the scale question, **87% of metered customers NET agreed that the tone of the language used on this section is 'just right'.** This was followed by **86% who NET agreed that the language was easy to understand.** Customers NET agreed the least with the statement 'It gives me confidence in the charges I pay to United Utilities for my water and sewerage services' at 76%. **All statements scored 4.4 mean score, aside from the page giving them confidence which was 4.1.**
- Like the previous section, respondents again showed high levels of agreement, with all scores above 4 out of 5, and NET agreement highest with the tone of language being 'just right' at 86%. **The webpage giving respondents confidence was again the lowest mean score and lowest NET agreement (4.1 and 76%).**
- The payments page was shown to respondents who again recorded **more likes (204) than dislikes (21),** with the majority of respondents (90%) felt that the language used is easy to understand. **The tone, layout, and appropriateness of the information provided all received NET agreement scores of 85% or higher.**
- In relation to the contacting us page, respondents again showed positive responses, with **192 likes compared to 29 dislikes** citing ease of understanding as likes, and QR codes as the main dislike. **Further, most respondents again agreed that the language used is clear and easy to understand, with 86% indicating NET agreement, and the lowest score given to confidence.** In relation to the leaflets page, there were 205 likes recorded compared to 35 dislikes, again the **highest NET agreement was that the language is easy to understand (87%).**
- Mean scores were high across the board for this question, with no score lower than 4.2, which was again given to confidence in charges I pay to United Utilities. **85% of respondents suggested that was no content missing from the webpage,** the highest score so far.
- In terms of customer friendliness, a mean score of 4.2 was recorded with 83% of respondents believing it was customer friendly overall.

Unmetered bills explained – feedback

Unmetered customers



Unmetered bills explained– Route B feedback

Analysis of scores

- Feedback was generally positive in heatmaps for this section. Number of likes consistently outweighed dislikes, and those who 'liked' the heatmaps referred to: ease of understanding, clarity of information, the level of detail included, contact details and helpful information. Comparatively, those who disliked this section referred to: **needing more information on metering, too much wastage, hard to see colour being used, lack of email address for contact and wanting opening hours included in the information.**
- As seen previously, feedback for this section was positive, with ease of understanding the highest NET agreement and mean score throughout the set of questions, regardless of the page on display. Scores for this statement ranged from 91% to 85% NET agreement with the statement, indicating no issue with the clarity and ease of understanding the information detailed in the pages. In terms of improvements to the section, **the information giving respondents confidence in the charges they pay to United Utilities was consistently the lowest scoring statement**, ranging from 71% to 79% across each of the question.
- In terms of missing content, **79% of respondents suggested that there was no missing content from the webpage**, and only 6% suggested that there was. Of those respondents who felt that there was something missing from the page, **15% suggested clear contact information, 15% suggested information on the calculations of charges, and 8% suggested further clarity on meters.**
- In terms of customer friendliness, **this webpage scored a mean score of 4.2, with 83% in NET agreement that it was friendly.**

Conclusions and recommendations



Conclusions

Shared expectations and frustrations

- Both groups wanted clearer bill breakdowns, more transparency around pricing, and greater reassurance that charges are fair and accurate. Across the board, 'confidence in the charges paid' scored lowest.

Metered customers

- Metered customers valued tools for tracking usage and comparisons over time, which supported budgeting. However, they reported confusion over technical terminology (e.g., 'volumetric charges') and sometimes found the layout cluttered or hard to navigate, especially when pages were dense or redirected elsewhere.

Unmetered customers

- Unmetered customers suggested simpler explanations of how rateable values and unmetered charges are calculated. Many questioned the fairness or benefit of switching to a meter, expressing a desire for side-by-side comparisons and greater control. Some also flagged issues with visual accessibility, such as white text on bright backgrounds or small font sizes.

User experience (UX) trends

- Both groups appreciated when content was action-oriented, well-structured, and supported by visuals. However, both also raised concerns about navigation, support access, and organisation of information.

Recommendations

Simplify Language and Personalise Tone

Use plain, jargon-free language throughout (e.g. replace 'volumetric') and ensure the tone is empathetic, especially in support-related sections (e.g. reframe 'struggling to pay' to 'need help managing your bill?').

Increase Transparency and Build Trust

Add clear, visual explanations for how charges are calculated, where customer payments go, and why bills are rising.

Include side-by-side comparisons for metered vs. unmetered users to support informed decisions.

Enhance Layout and Accessibility

Improve readability by increasing font size, decluttering dense areas, and ensuring compatibility with accessibility needs (e.g. better contrast, less reliance on QR codes or social media).

Strengthen Navigation and Support Tools

Streamline user journeys by grouping related content and reducing redirects.

Make support options more visible and varied—offering clear contact links, phone numbers, and help buttons in every key section.