

DRAFT – FOR APPROVAL

YourVoice - Minutes of 21 July 2021 Meeting via MS Team

Present:

YourVoice members Bernice Law – Independent Chair Tayo Adebawale – Independent Member Andrew White – Consumer Council for Water Dave Thompson – Disability Partnership, Warrington Steve Cullen – Citizens Advice & Money Advice Claire Bunter – Environment Agency Keith Ashcroft – Environment Agency	United Utilities Gaynor Kenyon – Corporate Affairs Director James Bullock – Strategy, Policy & Regulation Director Louise Beardmore – Customer Services & People Director (part) Simon Chadwick – Water, Wastewater and Digital Services Director (part) Jo Harrison – Environmental Planning & Innovation Director Emma Dennett – Regulatory Contract Manager Ben Nadel – Regulation, Reform & Compliance Manager (part) Ken Dillon – Research Partner
Apologies Alistair Maltby – The Woodland Trust, Richard Jarvis – Public Health England, Allen Creedy – Federation of Small Businesses, Adam Briggs – National Farmers Union, Bhupendra Mistry – Consumer Council for Water, Deborah Murray – Groundwork, Greater Manchester, Mark Atherton – Director of Environment, Greater Manchester Combined Authority.	

Item 1 – Introductions and apologies & actions from the previous meeting

Apologies were noted as listed above. The minutes were accepted and it was noted that actions 1, 2, 7 and 12 as listed in the agenda pack would be carried forward. All other items had been completed.

Item 2 – Ofwat PR24 and beyond: Creating tomorrow today

James Bullock gave an overview of the contents of the recent consultation paper from Ofwat, concerning the potential approach to the next Price Review process, and outline the implications to various aspects, including customer research and the role of Customer Challenge Groups.

- Key headlines:
 - Timetable confirmed
 - 4 key themes: increased focus on the long term, clearer understanding of customers and communities, greater environmental and social values; & improvements through efficiency and innovation
- Ofwat is likely to undertake a large amount of customer research itself in order to aid comparability and reconciliation
- Ofwat has also said it will not require CCGs to submit a report on how well companies have engaged with customers, but will provide guidance on achieving good quality customer engagement and on what independent challenge and assurance looks like

Points raised in discussion included:

- Concern about retaining the importance of local research and local challenge groups
- Big challenges appear to be ahead for the company and there is an opportunity for the company to plan further ahead, longer term.

Action: Jo Harrison to contact Dave Thompson to discuss opportunities for Blue Monday and partnerships

Andy White presented a CCW paper on “Future Consumer Representation Models” which outlines potential options for customer challenge and assurances in future price reviews.

The paper states that proposals build on lessons learnt in PR19 and that whilst CCW believes that local challenge remains important, it argues for greater central oversight to enable better comparative and sharing of information.

CCW preference is for the creation of a Central Oversight Group that supported by local stakeholder groups. These would be similar to CCGs, but would be centrally funded.

Other sectors, such as energy, were mentioned as potential models for challenge panels and consumer panels populated by expert consumers.

Points raised in discussion included:

- Objection to the implication that CCGs and members were universally 'captured' during PR19, with members commenting that they abide by the Nolan Principles
- The need for further explanation about centralised funding for stakeholder involvement
- Caution against introducing a more complex set of arrangements in place of the current system
- Questions on the cost/benefit of the various alternatives
- Concern that the proposals may appear as a 'land-grab' by CCW benefiting its role in the sector
- The 'expert patient' model may have benefits to offer in comparison to expert customers proposals
- The need for further clarity on how the proposals will move forward.

Action – Andy White to speak to Dave Thompson following the meeting to review options in terms of expert customer proposals

Action – Andy White to provide clarity at a future meeting as to how the proposals will move forward

Item 3– Customer research programme update

Ben Nadel outlined the emerging customer research planning framework, governing the approach to 'business-as-usual' day-to-day customer research, as well as incorporating the potential requirements in the run up to PR24 Price Review. The focus was on the approach to engaging with hard-to-reach or vulnerable customers.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Dave Thompson asked the research proposals for expectations on Priority Services to be brought to the A & V panel for discussion
- Members commented on the importance of good design of experiments on customer insight gathering and on behaviour change.
- Further changes to the overall approach may be required once Ofwat finalise the guidance for PR24, however 'BAU' requirements will continue to be commissioned as per current timetable.
- The engagement subgroup will be involved in scrutinising the projects on the forward schedule, and will report back to the main group on any areas of particular interest

Action: Ben Nadel to contact Dave Thompson on referral of Priority Services research proposals to the Affordability & Vulnerability panel

Action: Ben Nadel to highlight behaviour change strategies e.g. water efficiency, at a future meeting

Item 4 – Quarterly Performance Report

Louise Beardmore presented the customer related performance measures for the previous period.

The impact of behavioural changes during COVID-19 lockdown on performance against the Per Capita Consumption target was reiterated, and progress in rolling out the new water efficiency strategy reviewed.

Simon Chadwick presented the network and operations performance measures covering wastewater and water for the previous period.

There is continued encouraging performance against the new Leakage target. The issues involved and action being taken to address targets showing as 'red' were explained.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members reminded the company that it had agreed to show trend data against its various performance commitments
- Repeat sewer flooding was highlighted as an area for which discussions with Ofwat have already started, to re-consider whether weighted measures might be more appropriate for prioritising versus single event flooding
- Clarification to explain why targets for gap sites and voids.

Action – Louise Beardmore to arrange for a 'Deep dive on PCC strategy' to be brought to a future meetings

Action – Louise Beardmore & Simon Chadwick to develop scorecards that also indicate the trend in each measure for future meeting

Item 5 – YourVoice Sub-Group Reports

Dr Tayo Adebawale highlighted the key issues discussed at the Environmental and Social Capital Sub-Group & Customer Engagement meetings held in earlier in June. This included:

Environment & Social Value subgroup

- Deep dive analysis given on Combined Sewer Overflows
- The challenges linked to customer and commercial behaviour
- Some of the issues related to highway drainage as well as micro-pollutants from industry

Customer Engagement subgroup

- Review of the annual performance Report and the balance of content based on YourVoice member feedback
- Discussion on engaging with so-called 'hard-to-reach' customers and how companies should work harder to engage with all their customer segments
- Detailed look at the PR24 research programme including a 'deep dive' into some of the proposed projects
- A review of the proposed Ofwat methodology; and
- Feedback from the Affordability & Vulnerability (A&V) panel chair, including the impact of 'deconditioning' as a result of the pandemic impacting on people's resilience in terms of physical and mental health

Dave Thompson gave short presentation on key issues discussed at the A&V panel meeting such as:

- 60% of people dying from covid and covid related illness so far have been disabled people
- Affordability support has increased for around 50k people in 2015/16 to over 200k in 2021
- Priority service register increased from 19k 2015/16 to 128k in 2021; and
- £2.5m in emergency grants in 2020 has increased to £5.5m in 2021

Steve Cullen suggested the company look at opportunities to inform customers about the availability of support, such as insurance, in the event of flooding.

Action - Louise Beardmore to report back with proposals at a future meeting

Item 6 – Annual Performance Reporting – update on development of the report

Emma Dennett ran through the final development of the customer APR and confirmed the publication of all APR documents in line with the required date. Members were thanked for their contribution to improvement in the content and appearance of the documents. Crystal Mark accreditation was obtained from the Campaign for Plain English for the Customer Summary and the YourVoice chair's accompanying statement of assurance.

An assessment of the sector comparison of performance data as well as a presentational comparative will be provided at the next meeting.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members thanked the company for allowing YourVoice to make contributions to the report and requested hard copies
- Members would like to see comparisons of the Year-1 performance graphic from across the water sector

The chair updated on her discussion with the board, in which she commended the company on its performance throughout the pandemic, including in relation to her own personal experience

- The chair highlighted areas remaining to be improved to the board, and confirmed that members attention will continue to be focused on such areas
- The board were appreciative of the time and attention members continue to expend on behalf of helping the company to improve its services and engagement with customers and passed on its thanks

Action – Emma Dennett to arrange for hard copies of the APR Customer Summary to be sent to members

Action – Emma Dennett to provide sector comparison, including graphical and performance data at the next meeting

Item 7 – Diversity & Inclusion.

Louise Beardmore outlined the activities that the company has started to understand and address the imbalance of opportunity for people from more diverse backgrounds, and around gender differences. Some progress has been made but there is more to be done.

A company called Clear Company was commissioned to perform a diversity and inclusivity audit and they identified areas for improvement, with a key programme now underway to address issues including:

- Diversity training – around language and culture addressing diversity
- This is Me campaign – collecting personal data about employees, because not all diversity is visual
- Changing the way UU recruits, set targets, and accelerates talent programmes for candidates from diverse backgrounds
- Bringing the outside in – Podcast interviews, masterclass sessions
- Changing customer and employee systems to reflect the need for neutral pronouns
- Holding an employee network AGM

The company has produced a video to promote an understanding of the diversity issues facing it and will provide access to the video for members to view.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Keith Ashcroft suggested a separate catch up with Louise Beardmore, to compare activities as the EA goes along the same journey.
- Representation of diversity over 30 years in the sector, has not moved significantly, but it must in future. It's important to allow the new generation coming through to take the lead

Item 8 – AOB and future meetings.

- No items were raised as additional business

DONM – to be set up following October 2021 and February 2022 half-term holiday breaks