

YourVoice - Minutes of 21 July 2020 Meeting held via MS Teams

Present:

YourVoice members Bernice Law – Independent Chair Tayo Adebowale – Independent Andrew White – Consumer Council for Water Bhupendra Mistry – Consumer Council for Water Dave Thompson – Warrington Disability Partnership Damian Waters – Confederation of British Industry Claire Bunter – Environment Agency Alistair Maltby – Woodland Trust Adam Briggs – National Farmers Union Allen Creedy – Federation of Small Businesses Deborah Murray – Groundwork GM Neil Cumberlidge – Independent Secretary	United Utilities Gaynor Kenyon – Corporate Affairs Director James Bullock – Strategy & Regulation Director Louise Beardmore – Customer Services & People Director Jo Harrison – Environment & Asset Strategy Director Mark Abbott – Regulatory Contract Manager Ken Dillon – Research & Engagement Partner Emma Dennett – Regulatory Contract Manager
Apologies Keith Ashcroft – Environment Agency	

Item 1 – Introductions and apologies

Bernice Law welcomed Deborah Murray, Operations and Development Director at Groundwork Greater Manchester as a new member of the panel.

Item 2 – Minutes/actions from 14 January 2020 meeting

The draft minutes were approved.

There were no outstanding actions. Bernice Law congratulated UU on organising another successful NW Affordability Summit in January 2020.

Item 3 – Sub-group reports

Tayo Adebowale highlighted key points from the Customer Engagement Sub-Group meeting on 30 January 2020:

- The ‘deep dive’ into the company’s use of the Water-Talk online panel.
- Agreement to assume oversight of UU’s independent Affordability and Vulnerability Panel, with its chair, Dave Thompson joining the Customer Engagement Sub-Group.
- Exploring action to target single and smaller households for water metering.
- Engaging with UU in developing the new customer research and engagement strategy.

Item 4 – Annual performance report

Mark Abbott explained that publication of the 2019/20 annual performance report on 14 July had included the usual customer summary document and YourVoice synopsis.

Mark took members through performance on key targets over the 2015-20 AMP 6 period, highlighting trends, challenges, successes and areas for improvement, and explaining the links between relevant AMP6 targets and the new suite of performance measures for 2020-25 agreed following PR19. Final under and over performance figures had resulted in a final net reward of £43.5 million for the company over the 2015-20 period.

YourVoice members made the following points:

- It was noted that £36.9 million of the final reward figure was linked to overperformance on the Private Sewers Service Index measure, which justified the company's investment in improving the private sewer network.
- It was recognised that underperformance on the Water Quality Service Index was due mainly to discolouration issues reported by customers, and that on the Reliable Water Service Index was driven largely by the effects of major incidents.
- Comparisons with the performance of other water companies tended to be made only where they were favourable to UU.
- Very positive comments had been made at the UU Board meeting about the value of YourVoice's work in influencing and challenging the company's performance.

Action: UU challenged to improve the use of comparisons with other water companies to cover areas of under- as well as over-performance.

Bernice Law noted that Mark's imminent retirement meant this was his last YourVoice meeting, so thanked him for his support and efforts over the last few years.

Item 5 – Affordability and the new social tariff scheme

Louise Beardmore outlined the efforts that had been made to maintain high standards of customer service during the COVID-19 pandemic, and summarised the company's existing commitment to supporting a range of affordability schemes for financially vulnerable customers. With the support of YourVoice and CCW, agreement had been reached to increase average customer bills by £5 to enable up to 45,000 struggling low income working age households to be supported via an extended Back on Track scheme. Customer data had been used to identify potential beneficiaries, and 8,000 had signed up to the enhanced scheme to date. Research was in hand to look at the impact of the enhanced scheme, to inform a review of this interim arrangement before March 2022.

Following earlier comments from YourVoice, the company had also contacted business customers to explain the types of support available to them in dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Item 6 – Environmental Performance Assessment

Jo Harrison explained that the company had attained a 3 Star rating from the Environment Agency in the 2019 EPA, due to an increased number of Category 3 pollution incidents. A Pollution Incident Reduction Plan is to be published, which will embed a systems thinking approach to building capability in this area, together with action to improve discharge compliance.

Claire Bunter noted that there had been zero Category 1 and 2 pollution incidents in 2019 and that the company has industry-leading levels of self-reporting. She welcomed the plans to reduce pollution incidents and ensure discharge compliance.

Item 7 – Water resources updates

a. Demand and supply

Jo Harrison outlined developments in the water demand and supply situation in 2020, highlighting the impact of changing weather patterns coupled with the need to produce an extra 8 billion litres of water to meet demand following the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Great efforts had been made to engage with customers to encourage water efficiency, and to ensure that the extra demand was met. Following high rainfall from June onwards, regional water storage levels had recovered strongly, including at the key Haweswater reservoir which was now back above trigger levels.

b. Water efficiency communications

Louise Beardmore described trials exploring different ways of engaging with customers to increase awareness of water efficiency and action to reduce water consumption in high priority areas. They involved: (a) direct 'save water, save money' marketing via text and email to metered customers in Stockport; and (b) trials in Blackburn and West Cumbria linking reduced water use to local community (hospice) support. Results to date indicate that direct communications have had a greater immediate impact, with the community approaches taking longer to build momentum, and there had been some useful learning about the most effective types of messages to encourage water efficiency.

Item 8 – Achieving a new normal

Louise Beardmore outlined the establishment of a business transformation project to build on the learning from the COVID-19 response and develop new ways of working across the organisation.

Item 9 – Any other business

a. Ofwat and CCGs

Bernice Law explained that an Ofwat report on the future of CCGs had been held over until a meeting with CCG Chairs could be arranged. James Bullock suggested that Ofwat may be awaiting the outcome of the CMA appeal by water companies before finalising its views about CCGs.

b. YourVoice webpage

Neil Cumberlidge drew attention to the revised YourVoice 'landing page' and supporting documents on the UU website.

Action: YourVoice members to review their biographical details and send any updates required to Ken Dillon.

c. Black Lives Matter

Tayo Adebawale asked how UU was responding to the Black Lives Matter movement. Louise Beardmore explained that external consultants had been engaged to look at the company's policies and processes from an equalities and social justice perspective, and she would be happy to bring the findings back to a future YourVoice meeting.

d. Disability Awareness Day

Dave Thompson outlined plans to hold a major online event on 25 October following the cancellation of this year's DAD in July due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

e. Date of next meeting

Action: Next meeting (via MS Teams) to be arranged in early October.