



# MINUTES of the Customer Challenge Group

On 16 May 2025, 09:30am – 3:00pm, Hammersmith Depot

## Present:

Sukhvinder Kaur-Stubbs	Chair of Customer Challenge Group	SK-S
David Brindle	Ambient Support	DB
Sarah Powell	Environment Agency	SP
Peter Daw	Greater London Authority	PD
Catherine Jones	CCW	CJ
Rob Scarrott	National Highways	RS
Jane MacBean	Buckinghamshire Council	JMB
Natalie Jakomis	Rightmove	NJ

## Thames Water:

David Bird	Retail Director	DAB
Hannah Pool	Abstractions, Transfers and Drought Planning Analyst	HP
Charlie Hewitt-Dean	Water Resource Engagement Lead	CHD
Sarah Davies	Head of Strategic Communications	SD
Beth Reeves	Business Resilience Lead	BR
Mariana Simpson	Regulatory Engagement Manager	MS

## Apologies:

Dr Charlotte Duke	London Economics	CD
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Agenda Item No.		Action
1.	Apologies for absence / Declarations of interests / Minutes from previous meeting	
	Apologies were noted and no additional declarations of interests have been recorded. The minutes from the meeting on 25 April 2025 were approved subject to amendment.	
2.	Transformation update	
	Following introductions, the first part of the discussion reflected on the recent Efra Select committee, with CCG highlighting their focus on bonuses. DAB recapped the way bonuses are structured across the company but was not able to provide details of any retention payments. CCG acknowledged that it is important to incentivise staff to be able to retain high quality employees but also highlighted the customers' perspective on this matter.  Turning to the transformation plan, DAB provided an update based on the presentation shared ahead of the meeting. DAB outlined that the original turnaround initiatives have been reviewed and agreement has been made which ones will be transitioning into the AMP8 transformation plan	

	<p>which is aligned to the Business Plan. DAB highlighted some of the key challenges linked to supply chain capacity and financial constraints while noting that the ongoing engagement with regulators and investors, expecting to conclude the financial restructuring early next year, may mean the plan has to evolve. The company's focus remains on ensuring stability and improving public trust while navigating financial and regulatory complexities.</p> <p>CCG thought that there is a real opportunity to improve company's reputation through greater customer engagement and through sharing a progress with customers on top of the annual reporting. DAB explained that TW are planning to expand use of the social media to be able to share what investment and improvements are done locally but this could only be done when there was a high level of confidence that the investment plan would not change.</p> <p>Turning to digital resilience, CCG recognised that legacy systems and data are often fragmented and not easy to modernise and were interested in plans to ensure the IT is future proofed. DAB explained that there is 100's of millions allocated for technology upgrades over the next five years which will see legacy IT systems being updated and streamlined as well major improvements in HR, finance, billing and workforce management systems. There is also technology roadmap which outlines a broader strategy to simplify and future-proof IT infrastructure.</p> <p>The next part of discussion focused on the customer service operating model and the investment in technology vs people. DAB highlighted the importance of people and the proactive problem solving which will anticipate future issues and improve operational efficiency and help to optimise resource allocation.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> TW to share details and insights from project Trafalgar</p> <p>Reflecting on the session, CCG noted the efforts to simplify complex initiatives and bring the teams along in the process. It was agreed that the timing for further updates will depend on developments over the next few months.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> TW to share further progress at the future meeting. Date tbc</p>	
3.	<p><b>Drought planning</b></p> <p>Following introductions, SD, HP and CHD stepped through presentation shared in advance of the meeting. The session provided information on current water supply and environmental conditions following recent dry weather and outlined planning for any potential drought restrictions. The second part of the presentation focused on communication strategy starting with enhancing messaging about water usage and conservation.</p> <p>CCG were interested to understand how messages are coordinated across different companies and regions especially for customers who may have waste services and water service provided by different companies. CCG also highlighted that in areas such as London, the boundaries between companies are not always clear. SD explained that there is a increased media focus on coordinating messaging across different regions. TW is also exploring more targeted, regional and hyperlocal communication.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> TW to clarify whether different messaging is sent to waste only customers and whether emails are used.</p>	

	<p><b>Action:</b> TW to share how decisions are made when use of the direct emails to customers is appropriate</p> <p>Reflecting on the impact of potential water usage and preparation for green infrastructure, the CCG asked for more details on any TUBs exclusion and how TW plans to engage and support potentially critically impacted communities such as farmers.</p> <p>CCG highlighted that customers' perspective on potential water usage restriction due to drought will be significantly influenced by leakage performance and potential flooding due to summer storms and asked for more information on leakage reduction. It was noted that deep dive on leakage is planned for June 2025 meeting.</p> <p>Turning to the upcoming customer research on drought, CCG highlighted their feedback on the recently reviewed proposal and outlined their challenge around the sample size. It was agreed that the response will follow offline post the meeting. It was noted that the teams are currently reviewing the timing of the research, and it may be postponed.</p>	
4.	<p><b>CCW tracking survey / Update on Customer panels</b></p> <p>CJ provided an update on Consumer Panels and recently published Water matters report.</p> <p><b><u>Customer panels</u></b> CJ explained the purpose of the panels will be to gather customers' feedback and take part in company accountability sessions. Panels will be diverse, recruited and facilitated by a research agency and refreshed every 18 months.</p> <p>To ensure transparency and accountability, there will be two accountability sessions a year where the panels meet with company Executives to discuss company performance. Companies must respond to panel concerns and publish action plans in response. CCW will monitor the progress.</p> <p><b><u>Water matters report</u></b> CJ shared high level summary of the published Water matter report which is based on relatively small sample of 200 customers per water and sewerage company (150 for a water only company). CJ highlighted that TW's trust score is the lowest in the industry with customer satisfaction with water and sewage services is also below average. The company's reputation has been impacted by recent challenges, leading to declining customer confidence. It was noted that other water sewerage companies have seen trust decline, with high salaries and bonuses contributing to negative sentiment. Decisions on bonus structures ultimately rest with regulators, but companies must better communicate their reasoning to the public and address consumers concerns.</p> <p>The rising bills are cause of the major concerns for customers with customers expecting clear explanations of how their money is used, especially in their local communities. It was disappointing that awareness of additional support has dropped despite of previous successful promotion but the sample size means this not statistically significant. Companies should use any customer contacts to offer relevant assistance, such as tariff adjustments or registering customers on Priority Service Register.</p> <p><b><u>Complaints assessments</u></b> CCW undertakes a complaint assessment with every company every year. For 2025-26, CCW will be publishing the results of these assessments, covering areas of good practice as well as areas that need focus. Companies will create plans to address key issues highlighted in the reports</p>	

	<p>including milestones and tracking progress. Actions plans will be overseen by CCW and shared with CCG to ensure transparency.</p> <p>CCG raised concerns over the high number of potential action plans which may overlap and potentially cause duplication.</p>	
5.	<b>Resilience forums</b>	
	<p>Following introductions, BR stepped through presentation shared in advance of the meeting. The session provided information on Civil Contingencies Act; Category 1 and 2 responders and their responsibilities as well as TW's engagement and activities with Local Resilience Forums (LRFs). BR shared her experience from different LRFs and panels. BR highlighted that the water sector and utilities play a key role in supporting emergency responders.</p> <p>Discussion focused on how the engagement with LRFs, and partner organisations can enhance planning and response capabilities. CCG were interested in how learnings from previous incidents are used. BR explained that for example the learnings from the recent Crystal Palace incident have been included in a pilot with Lambeth Borough and all learnings are used for continuous improvement. The pilot will leverage local knowledge of key partners to build alternative approaches to deliver alternative water (e.g. community hubs, bus routes / rubbish collection route planning)</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Follow up session to be arranged with LRF and infrastructure group to share insights from the Lambeth pilot</p> <p>BR highlighted how programme will continue to evolve with exercises designed to refine operational responses and emergency preparedness to help with long-term planning.</p>	
6.	<b>CCG forward plan</b>	
	<p>CCG reflected on the meeting and discussed key points they would like to include on the forward plan alongside of key actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TW to share organisational structure for AOCD</li> <li>• TW to share lessons learnt from Drought 2022</li> <li>• CCG to clarify outstanding questions for future session on bill impacts</li> <li>• CCG to agree questions for discussion with TW Chairman of the Board</li> <li>• CCG to ask CCW to differentiate between customer panels and ICGs</li> </ul>	
7.	<b>AOB</b>	
	Next CCG meeting on 26 June 2025	