



MINUTES of the Customer Challenge Group

Microsoft Teams

On 3 November 2022, 9am – 2pm

Present:

Sukhvinder Kaur-Stubbs	Chair of Customer Challenge Group	SK-S
Jeremy Crook OBE	Action for Race Equality	JC
Baroness Grey-Thompson DBE, DL	Chair of Sport Wales	BGT
Doug Taylor	CCW	DT
Dr Charlotte Duke	London Economics	CD
Councillor Adam Jogee	Haringey Local Authority	AJ
Councillor Dr Pete Sudbury	Oxfordshire County Council	PS
Monica Wilson	HM Treasury	MW
Tiger de Souza MBE	National Trust	TDS
Nisha Arora	Financial Conduct Authority	NA
David Brindle	Ambient Support	DB
Sarah Powell	Environment Agency	SP

Thames Water:

Lynne Graham	People Director	LG
Karima Khandker	Head of Resourcing, Skills and Emerging Talent	KK
Linda Bennett	Incident Response Development Manager	LB
Daniel Garside	Head of Incident Management	DG
Mariana Simpson	Stakeholder Relationship Engagement Manager	MS

Apologies:

Peter Daw	Greater London Authority	PD
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Agenda Item No.		Action
1.	<p>Apologies for absence / Declarations of interests / Matters arising</p> <p>Apologies were noted including NA and PS for part of the meeting. Minutes from the previous meeting on 7 October were approved, subject to one change.</p> <p>CCG asked about the imperative for phosphate removal as Concern about phosphates had not been identified from TW customers.</p> <p>SP clarified that EA do not recommend policy to DEFRA but deliver it. SKS suggested for SP to provide a short presentation on EA role.</p> <p>Action: Presentation on EA role from SP to be scheduled for future meetings.</p> <p>It was noted that updates to actions raised are being updated at the action tracker on the SharePoint site.</p>	
2.	CCG Chair report and Members' feedback	

SKS provided feedback from her recent visit to Swindon with Warren Buckley and Catherine Lynne, Chair of the TW Customer Service Committee. They had listened to customers calling in and recognised how long and complicated some of the issues were especially regarding people in vulnerable circumstances and encouraged plans to liaise with voluntary organisations on income maximisation and debt checking. They also heard from the group handling complaints that go directly to the CEO office. SKS had talked directly to Warren about complaints coming through to CCG members and the reputational benefits of intercepting certain issues. He had agreed to extend their new Friends and Family route to the CCG. (Mariana – will you please double check as I believe this is what Warren agreed)

It was noted that CCW will be completing a review of CCGs which will include interviews with Chairs and SKS would welcome CCG members' views.

Action: Questionnaire for CCW review to be shared with CCG members to gather their views.

SKS provided feedback from an event she attended on Collaborative Regulation which included input from David Black CEO of OFWAT. Discussed points included the role of robust regulation in lowering the cost of capital to keep bills down for customers. Some concerns were raised about regulators. There was a call for outcome focussed regulation and the need to build trust and confidence with the public to get them on side. Dieter Helms 'utopian' view on catchment areas was mentioned as a radical alternative. There was acceptance that regulators had to act not just in the immediate interests but also longer term with big investment projects like Tideway and reservoirs cited as not happening without the right incentives. A view was put forward that strong service incentives helped drive up standards and corporate culture. There was criticism of water companies for the storm discharges becoming routine rather than emergency measures e.g. around 80% of overflows were probably related to operational maintenance issues so the inference is that companies were not being transparent in their reporting. In terms of moving towards outcome regulation, the emphasis was on the need to:

- specify meaningful outcomes.
- Allocate responsibilities clearly and fairly (e.g. how much of the bill is picked up by customers)
- Have verifiable data (e.g. availability of technology to observe what is happening in rivers but EA/DEFRA doesn't prioritise this)
- Have a process that holds companies to account

SKS had spoken personally to David Black about the impact of incentives and penalties on customers. She asked about the potential for companies to aggregate the penalty payments into more meaningful investment for customers rather than distribution of a few pounds reduction on each bill. David Black was sceptical and if anything, felt the penalties should be even higher.

SKS also alerted members to reports from Citizens Advice and Delta EE on Alternative regulations (to the RIIO Framework) from energy networks. [Future Network Regulation](#)

JC provided feedback on upcoming Vulnerability research deep dive and the CCG input into shaping this research. He was pleased that on his recommendation, a new specialist provider had been engaged (Ethnic Opinions) to conduct the research. CD had also provided detailed feedback on the methodology. Among the points she flagged in her email was the need to be assured that the sampling approach was capturing vulnerability.

MS re-confirmed post meeting that all CCG feedback was shared with the chosen agency and TW will continue to engage CCG on this topic during the next phase in late November / early December.

	<p>PS and BGT provided a short update on WRSE engagement, noting upcoming meetings on 14 November which CCG members are welcome to attend as well as 22 November meeting. BGT thought the recent consultations demonstrated an increased willingness to listen. Questions marks still remained about the desired level of resilience of the reservoirs. PS talked about his views on climate change – he could see extreme weather scenarios happening more frequently on a larger scale. He asserted the need for engineering solutions working back from 2 and 4 degree scenarios. Brief comments from members reinforced the sobering but accurate world view that is not reflected in customer comments. The Public value Sub-Group were tasked with exploring future proofing and identifying the right level of investment for different futures. Their focus would include how to support efforts to shift supply and demand and how to properly engage customers and stakeholders on these challenges.</p>	
<p>3.</p>	<p>Culture, Skills and EDI</p>	
	<p>BGT introduced the presentation. Her sub-group had liaised with the HR team because the staffing culture was felt important to customer and community experience. The extent to which the TW workforce reflects the diversity of the customer base had the potential to improve relationships with customers and improve the reputation of the company as an employer of choice.</p> <p>LG and KK shared an update on Culture, Skills and EDI.</p> <p>LG explained TW Values, focusing on the journey so far to ensure that all company and supply chain employees' behaviours align with the values in order to set the company up for success to deliver the TW turnaround plan. Personal stories were used to bring the values to life.</p> <p>The discussion focused on introducing changes to employee survey - TW is keen to track areas where they previously scored lower (e.g. reward) but the wording is being tweaked to align more tightly to the values; morale across the company. LG recognised that the teams' resilience has been tested with ongoing performance and operational challenges – the summer for example had seen a series of low frequency high intensity events. But this is countered by the teams seeing changes happening through recent investment; as well reporting processes, and links between employee engagement and customer outcomes is improving.</p> <p>Action: LG to consider how to strengthen the link between employees engagement with customer outcomes</p> <p>KK provided an update on Skills strategy which went live in April 2021 and support TW skilled workforce by a robust education skill system. The principles focused to improve diversity of the workforce, create careers, establish sustainable strategic skills partners and adopt a leading position in the industry. KK shared progress so far on the number of initiative which TW is embracing including apprenticeship and getting more diverse teams into employment (e.g. kickstarters / prison leavers / care leavers / internships)</p> <p>The discussion focused on internships, targeting opportunities through partnerships</p> <p>KK shared TW AMP7 targets for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) alongside of the progress so far – noting that while significant progress has been made in terms of representation, focus going forward need to be on the retention of the colleagues. This will be delivered through number of</p>	

	<p>initiatives focusing on living our values; attraction and retention; reporting and insight and empowered networks.</p> <p>The discussion focused on targets for diversity and link to attraction and the importance for inclusive working environment. Members expressed some concern about the use of the word 'ethnics' to describe black, Asian and minority ethnic staff even though this was endorsed by the staff themselves. Members also reflected on feedback from staff about the CCG and some scepticism about our emphasis on vulnerability and hearing from minority concerns.</p> <p>Action: KK to share the impact on those differently abled or with a learner difference across our various programmes</p> <p>Action: KK to connect with JC and invite him to attend a future REACH network meeting. KK and JC meeting booked for 28th Nov</p>	
4.	<p>Incident Management</p>	
	<p>DG and LB shared presentation on Incident Management Arrangements covering how TW respond to incidents, Command and Control structures and support for vulnerable customers, followed by case study on recent incident in Heyford Hill, Oxford.</p> <p>A key point of discussion was the communication with customers and liaison with stakeholders (especially Local Authorities) during incidents and around planned work. Further information was requested on collaboration with Local Authorities and Local Resilience Forums. There was an acknowledgement that while the processes and planning have improved over last few years, there is an opportunity to strengthen some aspects e.g. customer comms ahead of planned work.</p> <p>When asked how customers know there is a problem, TW thought they were better at communicating in emergency rather than planned works.</p> <p>Further discussion focused on support for vulnerable customers – noting that TW work with local authorities during incidents to gather details of vulnerable customers but the data are usually much wider. This re-iterated the need for good data sharing across the industry to ensure vulnerable customers can be well supported.</p> <p>When explaining the Control Towers and Runways structure, SP suggested that Environment should be made more explicit in the Control Towers arrangements to ensure the environmental impact is not forgotten although it was noted that environmental impact feeds through the System operation control tower (e.g., pollution incident desk, water sampling etc.)</p> <p>Case study on Heyford Hill in Oxford provided an overview of the operational response but focused on customer support provided during the incident including reconfiguring network, providing additional tankers, bottled water supplies and home deliveries to customers on the Priority Service Register.</p> <p>On being asked which team members were able to speak directly to the public, TW said that all were briefed, and each team had ambassadors to ensure the team remained responsive and sensitive to customers/community, especially when they came across people in vulnerable circumstances</p> <p>The ambassador support sees volunteers from across the company support operational teams to deliver better service for customers; Customer reps working on the ground connecting with customers to ensure they are well and correctly informed.</p>	

	<p>Final part of the session focused on operational response during the Oxford incident, working with Stakeholders and planned improvements for Incident Management overall which include lessons learnt from previous incidents to ensure TW can provide best customer service possible where the incidents cannot be prevented.</p> <p>Members asked about the feedback loop on learning from incidents to improve service and customer experience. CCG felt there was more the incident response team could do to engage with and learn from customers</p> <p>Action: Further details to be shared on comms including social media, connections on the ground including Local Resilience Forums and how the comms work between TW and LAs (to be included on the agenda for 20 January) ME supported by AJ and DT help shape and introduce the session.</p>	
5.	CCG discussion	
	<p>DB introduced a discussion on customers vs citizens. The aim was to identify the role of the CCG in addressing the climate crisis and the extent to which it can show leadership and move beyond the more immediate interests anticipated from typical bill payers.</p> <p>The discussion moved on to the framework of the next year's report and how to reflect the balance between the wider challenges such as climate change and the narrow remit of CCG, as well as difference between the customers vs citizens issues as typically picked up in the media.</p> <p>CCG considered the importance of understanding and challenging the company on behalf of customers' to ensure that all customers' want and needs including future customers are translated into the business plan. There was an acknowledgment of the difference between informed and uninformed customers and the limitations this presented for meaningful research. People's immediate issues don't always correlate with wider global concerns.</p> <p>Among the issues flagged by CCG members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defined role/purpose of CCG's (all inward facing) - Need to challenge from customer perspective - Limitations of research in capturing future customer needs, customer biases and skewed viewpoints - How to interpret customer wants through a longer term lens. - Importance of intergenerational equity <p>It was agreed that the principal role of the CCG was to challenge TW on their planning and delivery. CCG primary role is not to engage in media discussion. If at any point we felt unable to get information from TW or satisfactory response to our challenge, we might then consider making our view public. CCG would continue to monitor the public debate to understand the context within which TW were working and to enrich understanding of customer perspectives.</p> <p>Action: SKS was planning to revisit the Terms of Reference to ensure they adequately reflected current priorities and were clear on working methods. She would also review CCG website to ensure it clearly outline CCG responsibilities (including what CCG do now and plan to do in the future) and interaction with customers. She asked for assistance and support from DB/BGT)</p> <p>Action: SKS/DB to draft a framework for the 2023 annual report early in 2023.</p>	

	Action: CCG to review / work through “what success would look like for CCG” (NA /DT/MW)	
8.	AOB	
	No AOB raised	