



MINUTES of the Customer Challenge Group

Kemble Court, Reading

On 20 January 2023, 10am – 3pm

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
Peter Daw	Greater London Authority	PD
Sarah Powell	Environment Agency	SP

Thames Water:

Sarah Bentley	CEO	SB
Catherine Lynn	NED, Chair of Customer Service Committee	CL
James Bentley	Operations Director, Thames Valley and Home Counties	JB
Steve Spencer	PR24 Operations Director	SS
Jonathan Read	Director of Regulatory Policy and Investigations	JR
Peter Trafford	Head of Regulatory and Market Economics	PT
Andrew Burton	Customer Research & Insight Manager	AB
Linda Bennett	Incident Response Development Manager	LB
Dan Garside	Head of Incident Management	DG
Paul Day	Contact Centre Manager	PD
Mariana Simpson	Stakeholder Relationship Engagement Manager	MS

Apologies:

Nick Land	NED, Chair of Regulatory Strategy Committee	NL
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Agenda Item No.		Action
1.	Apologies for absence / Declarations of interests / Matters arising / Chair update	
	<p>SKS welcomed everyone to the meeting, followed by introductions from TW and CCG attendees. Apologies were noted, including PS for part of the meeting. Minutes from the previous meeting on 16 December 2022 were approved.</p> <p>SKS set out the agenda for the day highlighting key topics and CCG contributors for the day. SKS provided a short update on activities since the last meeting as well as the focus going forward and specifically on the PR24 focus group, which will continue to engage with TW on deep dive issues and will share progress and updates with the wider CCG. SKS highlighted the number of</p>	

	<p>cross cutting themes such as vulnerability (led by JC and AJ) and “Challenge the plan” workstream (led by TDS and MW).</p> <p>Following on from the meeting with DAB, it was suggested to run a Comms workshop with CCG focusing on social media. This will be arranged for February 2023 and will be led by DB. All CCG members will be invited.</p> <p>SKS also shared a plan for the CCG planning day which will include session on effective challenge, the day structure and content is being developed by SKS/DB/BGT</p> <p>It was noted that updates to actions raised are being updated at the action tracker on the SharePoint site. Some of the actions including specific questions on Wastewater performance and Incident Management will be closed through presentations during the meeting.</p> <p>SB and JB shared an update on the newly published Environment Discharges Monitoring. SB noted while it triggered more media comment on the topic, generally stakeholders are fully supportive of increased transparency. SB explained how the new information published had received thousands of hits on the website, and resulted in 420 customer contacts of which two were complaints.</p>	
2.	PR24 Update	
	<p>SS provided an update on the progress of PR24 development focusing on the challenges including much greater statutory requirements than previous AMPs; customer support for increased resilience and the need to improve performance. The balance between each is a critical element of the plan, not least because of the potential impacts on bill affordability.</p> <p>The discussion focused on plan scenarios including timings, customer priorities ranking and next steps. When discussing customer priorities CCG was interested whether the lower priorities are being seen by customers as hygiene factors and were seen by customers as ‘taken for granted’ that it should be delivered.</p> <p>SS and SKS shared challenges raised by the focus group including financial analysis, deliverability, line of sight and plan narrative. SS explained that further work is being currently completed around reframing and rethinking some of the key areas which will help with the narrative and line of sight through to customer priorities.</p> <p>SKS encouraged CCG members to raise any questions through the focus group.</p>	
3.	Implications from Ofwat Final Methodology	
	<p>PT shared summary and key points from Ofwat PR24 Final methodology published in December 2022. PT also highlighted Ofwat’s responses to key TW points raised through the response to Draft methodology.</p> <p>Discussion focused on Ofwat’s Quality and Ambition Assessment; CCG was interested to understand how ambitious TW can be. JR explained that the ambition is calibrated depending on the company’s position in the industry and stressed the importance of the plan being deliverable. TW ambition is stretching, notwithstanding the recent increased in Capital Delivery capabilities.</p> <p>CCG was interested in what the Final Methodology in broad terms means for average current and future customers – PT explained that Ofwat wants companies to stretch their performance as much as possible for companies to deliver more for their customers.</p>	

	<p>Further discussion focused on bespoke Performance Commitments (PC). CCG noted their disappointment over Ofwat’s response to the potential vulnerability bespoke PC as they thought this would be beneficial to TW customers. CCG were clear that this is one of the areas where TW performs well and could positively benefit more.</p> <p>CCG was also interested in whether multi AMP proposals are possible and while PT explained Ofwat requested companies to provide their Longer Term Delivery Strategies (LTDS), Business Plan submissions continue to focus on 5 years cycles. Being able to make longer term commitments would be more efficient.</p> <p>Action: LTDS to be added to future meetings – Added to 31 March 2023</p>	
4.	<p>Challenge the plan (Acceptability & Affordability Testing and Open Challenge Sessions)</p>	
	<p>AB set out the context, including the initial proposal.</p> <p>The CCG nominated TDS and MW to work with TW on the Challenge the Plan workstream including Acceptability and Affordability Testing (AAT) and Open Challenge Sessions which are branded as Your Water Your Say (YWYS). Members of the PR24 focus group to be also invited to detailed sessions.</p> <p>TDS and MW highlighted that the CCG core role is to scrutinise this research and to ensure CCG have satisfied themselves that it is completed to Ofwat / CCW requirements. MW also highlighted the importance of TW sharing the Business Plan being tested as part of this research to minimise any delays.</p> <p>CCG was keen to ensure that customers not usually heard should be targeted to take part. TW need to make sure that their method is inclusive, e.g. 121s for people with health vulnerabilities.</p> <p>AB explained that given TW are working together with Affinity Water on AAT, AB will provide recommendations on how both TW CCG focus group and Affinity ICG will work together.</p> <p>Action: AB to share proposal for plan with TW CCG focus group and Affinity ICG.</p> <p>Action: TW to share independent assurance report and independent assurers to attend future CCG meeting to provide confidence to CCG that Ofwat’s requirements have been met (Proposed timing for April / May 2023 - TBC)</p> <p>YWYS discussion focused on the composition of who may attend, and AB explained it is not going to be representative of TW Customer based as its “opt in” activity. DT raised the importance of the moderator needing to be very skilled to unpick existing awareness & understanding and the bearing on the views expressed.</p> <p>On wider PR24 engagement, CCG agreed with AB’s recommendations not to run a wider consultation alongside the YWYS session but agreed with the importance of raising awareness through a number of promotional activities.</p> <p>CCG raised a number of questions regarding how TW will respond to customers’ views. SB and CL underlined the importance of Line of Sight which will show how TW used customers’ views alongside other considerations. TW need to be able to demonstrate where trade-offs are made and see evidence that TW listens to customers’ views. Line of Sight continues to be a key area where TW welcome CCG Challenge through the upcoming months.</p>	

5.	Wholesale performance (Wastewater questions focus)	
	<p>JB introduced himself to the CCG and provided a short overview of his career before providing a short update on Wastewater performance focusing on pollution and blockages.</p> <p>JB noted that it has been a challenging year so far and noted that many pollution incidents are caused by blockages. The ongoing focus on performance and increase of sewer monitors not only resulted in reduction in blockages but also helped prevent number of discharges and avoid incidents.</p> <p>Discussion focused on serious pollutions and the implications of raising mains failure which can result in catastrophic consequences due to the pressure they operate under. TW increased the regular inspections based on risk assessment to identify any remedial work ahead of failure as well as sewer cleaning which increased 5 times in recent years and increased tankering. CCG were interested to understand what is the % of assets that need some intervention. JB noted that TW carry out 5x more sewer cleaning than a few years ago.</p> <p>Action: Forward plan to include session on Asset Health and its links to wider turnaround plan from CS and her team.</p> <p>Discussion focused on planning for the future to build resilience and impacts of climate change. CCG was concerned how much of resilience is about building future resilience vs how much is about catching up. It was explained that some of the sites are working at full capacity and to build resilience is about increasing capacity and flexibility. It was recognised that this is a long-term problem where infrastructure has been built in the past and appropriate prioritisation needs to be done as part of the BP.</p>	
6.	Incident Management Control room / Customer Ops contact centre Teams meet and greet	
	No minutes recorded	
7.	Listening to variety of calls / discussion	
	<p>CCG listened to a variety of pre-recorded and live calls.</p> <p>CCG was impressed by the video call with virtual technician but raised a concern whether it will raise two tiers service for customers – whether customers taking up this route will delivery in efficiency / increased speed in standard calls responses</p> <p>Discussion focused on preferred channels of communication and query over TW not having their contact telephone number on the landing page. It was noted that telephone contact is not necessarily preferred or the most effective way of communication, especially where customers are offered self-help features.</p> <p>Further discussion focused on questions raised on from example calls regarding question on charges, wording over follow up arrangements and the hours which the company offers to attend to resolve customers’ issues.</p> <p>When discussing customers’ satisfactions with calls, it was noted that if a customer scores an agent’s interaction low in the follow up survey it will be followed by a proactive call to aim to resolve the customer’s issue in a more satisfactory way.</p>	

8.	Incident management – working with Local Resilience Forums / Work with LAs during incidents	
	<p>DG and LB provided an overview of proactive and reactive work with Local Resilience Forums with examples of engagement, collaboration, and practice from planning to responding to incidents.</p> <p>The discussion focused on working Local Authorities in relation to incidents and emergency planning including named contacts / cascades through organisations. When discussing support for vulnerable customers it was noted that data sharing agreements are in place, but the pace and formats of data may vary. SKS was keen for CCG to help improve networking where possible.</p> <p>Action: Follow up meeting to be set up with DG/LB/PD/DT/AG to discuss engagement and communication with Local authorities and cross check named contacts etc.</p> <p>Further discussion focused on Customer Comms and supporting customers during incidents. LB highlighted that TW is moving to a new permanent team of Customer incidents respondents who will be supporting customers during incidents (e.g. handing out bottled water).</p>	
9.	AOB	
	<p>SB shared a recent contact from a customer who is a sculptor and been inspired by TW leak detectors to create an entire art exhibition in London called The Listeners!</p> <p>During a final summary of the meeting, CCG thanked TW staff for their engagement, highlighting that the extent to which everyone they met were passionate and customer focused.</p> <p>Next CCG planning meeting will take place on 3 February 2023 and the next formal CCG meeting on 3 March 2023.</p>	