

Meeting: Anglian Water Affordability and Vulnerability Panel,
Sub-Panel of Customer Engagement Forum (CEF) for Anglian Water

Date: Friday, 16 April 2018

Time: 10.00 – 14.00

Location: Thorpe Wood House, Peterborough, PE3 6WT

Present:	<p>Martin Lord – Chair of Panel; member of CEF; CEO of Central and East Northamptonshire Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB)</p> <p>Peter Christmas – Ground Work East</p> <p>Janet Cooke – Peterborough Dementia Action Alliance</p> <p>Trevor Edwards – Dept of Work and Pensions, seconded to Business in the Community, Great Yarmouth</p> <p>Julie Farrow – Hunts and Cambridgeshire Forum</p> <p>Jeff Halliwell – Chair of Customer Engagement Forum, Anglian Water</p> <p>Jenny Hodson – Voluntary Action</p> <p>Gill Holmes – local consumer advocate for CCWater, member of CEF and CESG for Anglian Water</p> <p>Lorraine Jarvis – Chair, Essex CVS Network</p> <p>Samantha Ross – Anglian Water, Customer Insight & Audit Manager</p> <p>Jordan White – Anglian Water, Regulatory Analyst</p> <p>Vicky Anning – CEF report author</p>
Apologies	<p>Rachel Atkinson, Claire Boyer, Stuart Dearden, Lynne Faulder, Tracey Manton, Phil Mawhinney, Jill Mortimer, Fiona Wynde</p>

Agenda Items

Action

1. Welcome and introductions

Jeff Halliwell, Chair of the Customer Engagement Forum (CEF) for Anglian Water, explained the role of CEF and how the Affordability and Vulnerability (A&V) Panel fits in. He reminded panel members of the CEF’s role to

- 1) check that Anglian Water is engaging with customers and
- 2) to what degree that engagement is reflected in the PR19 business plan that is due to be submitted to Ofwat on 3 September.

The A&V Panel has been established to scrutinise and challenge the company on its proposals for affordability of bills for all customers and delivering services to vulnerable customers. They will be expected to feed in a panel report giving their views on affordability and vulnerability in time for 5 June

CEF meeting.

Timelines:

- Outline plan out to consultation with customers on 28 March until 9 May.
- A final synthesis report of all AW's Customer Engagement in PR19 will be available on 4 June.
- Next CEF meetings: 5 June and 31 July
- Deadline for report submission: 3 September

2. Review of previous minutes and actions

Minutes from 23 February meeting were approved.

Outstanding actions were discussed:

- Sam will circulate case studies as soon as these are ready and will give a verbal update on vulnerability work to date
- Sam has passed on feedback from Martin re. leaflet produced with utility companies (**leaflet is saved on ShareFile, under Supporting Documents**)
- Sam also passed on link from Trevor regarding social mobility (but wasn't sure if company had applied for this)
- In terms of sharing mapping data on vulnerable customers, Sam will make sure this is included in a future panel meeting (June)
- Sam has saved the Incling report referenced in the previous minutes in the ShareFile and planned to discuss it in the meeting. (**Saved in Sharefile under Research**)

3. Overview of Ofwat Aide Memoire to CCGs and Vulnerability

Gill Holmes from CCWater gave an overview of information contained in the Aide Memoire to CCGs pertinent to the A&V Panel's work. She explained that the panel will be asked to give their views on the outline business plan at the 25 May meeting. This will be fed back to the main CEF, which will in turn be submitted to Ofwat in the CEF report by 3 September.

In respect of **Affordability**, the Aide Memoire says:

- Companies must show how their approaches have, and will, deliver affordability for current customers, future customers and those struggling to pay;
- Includes evidence of customer engagement carried out on these approaches;
- CCGs should consider how well the company understands what affordability looks like for its customers and customer support for the approach taken.

In respect of **Vulnerability**, the Aide-Memoire encourages CCGs to use the [Ofwat February 2016 Vulnerability Focus Report](#) to challenge companies on their plans.

This report:

- Says it is essential that water companies have an in-depth understanding of their customer base and the specific needs and requirements of different types of customers. **Accessibility** to services is key.
- Sets out definitions of vulnerability – a broad definition and mirrored by that used by Anglian – and including temporary/transitory vulnerability.
- It identifies three key principles of good service that water companies should consider when developing their approach to vulnerability:
 - Companies should aspire to provide excellent service to **all customers**
 - **Effective use of data**
 - **Partnership working** with other utilities and third party organisations.

Potential areas of question/challenge:

- Do the company's plans regarding **Affordability** reflect the message set out in the Aide Memoire?
- How **accessible** are the company's financial assistance measures?
- How well is the company using **data** to identify customers in **vulnerable circumstances** and how well are they understanding the reasons for this?
- How well is the company **engaging** with utilities and third parties to identify vulnerability?
- How well is the company **addressing** vulnerability – how effective/efficient is their approach?
- How well has the company engaged its customers and stakeholders.

The panel will also need to consider the proposed mandatory bespoke performance commitment on vulnerability.

4. Customer Engagement – Vulnerability

Samantha Ross provided an overview of AW's customer engagement on vulnerability, drawing on four main pieces of research (saved on the ShareFile).

- **Community Research:** 20 extended interviews in six locations (found there is scope to increase customer awareness of the support AW can provide for customers in vulnerable circumstances; highlighted different emotional responses to their situation – some people ask for help, others don't like to ask for help). Data sharing is welcomed by customers, providing driver is to help customer (tell us once approach). **(Saved in Sharefile under Research)**

- **Accent:** in-home interviews in five locations – found that not all vulnerable customers required same degree of support (from desperate and drowning to living to the max segment, typically able to support selves quite well e.g. through friends & family, so don't need a lot of help. As an example, elderly customers with sight issues may just need bills in larger font). **(Saved in Sharefile under Research)**
- **Incling:** online community set up for 50 customers to give views on vulnerability. **(Saved in Sharefile under Research)**
- **Community Research:** will be carrying out focus groups in different areas and segments. Jordan White attended a focus group with a group of women in Ipswich who were looking at the performance measure on vulnerability. They liked the quantitative measure (increasing number of people on PSR), although they worried about achieving the level of increase. It was harder to engage them on the independent panel idea, however.

Martin Lord asked whether the proposed performance commitment will form part of the focus group questioning – and asked how this question will be asked.

Gill reported that she had attended a focus group in Corby (low-income group, all in work). There was a question at the end of the session about the proposed performance commitment. Customers felt strongly that AW shouldn't increase number of people on PSR. They felt people should be able to help themselves rather than being forced onto the register. They were also worried about the cost to the company of an independent panel.

Gill felt that financial rewards and penalties weren't explicit enough in the questions – for example, it wasn't explicit that bills may go down if performance goes into penalty territory and may increase if it goes into reward territory.

Peter asked whether PSR data was included on each bill. Sam said it was.

Martin asked whether there was a paper trail evidencing customer support for definition of vulnerability and support for PSR and for the panel. At the moment, evidence is a bit thin, he said.

Sam said they will need to look at this in more detail after the focus groups have finished. These were currently about half way through the process.

Sam said there were also other elements of vulnerability woven through the synthesis report (e.g. Given carried out 'customer world' focus group).

Action: Sam said she would share the Given research to the [ShareFile](#) **(complete – saved in Sharefile under Research)**

SR

Outline Business Plan

Jeff said it would be useful to have a one-pager detailing the thread of customer engagement relating to the ODI on vulnerability.

Lorraine Jarvis asked whether PSR aligned with local authority list of vulnerable residents (and suggested it may be worth doing a pilot study).

She also said she would like to see more in the Business Plan about partnerships with organisations and the voluntary sector already working with customers (e.g. CAB, mental health hubs etc.)

Sam said the company was trying to build stronger links – she has been to lots of forums. But she identified the need for more resources to invest in partnerships to help deliver the plan.

Martin said that the outline business plan talks about partnerships in a way that the previous plan didn't – but asked how the panel could hold the company to account for this and take a view/measure it?

There was general consensus that there was much more voluntary organisations could do to help get the word out to customers about the support available through Anglian Water for vulnerable customers.

Peter suggested setting up a baseline around the number of referrals received from specific areas or organisations and adding smart targets to know what's been achieved.

Trevor suggested that the focus should be on specific deprived areas, rather than taking a scatter gun approach.

Martin agreed that he would like to see more ambition around the use of the voluntary sector and other partnerships.

Sam said the company was working with food banks and housing associations but needed to find new routes too. She would envisage partnership being measured/assessed by the panel and said this discussion would be brought back to the next meeting.

SR

Gill said that CCWater is looking at an increase in the number of customers needing financial assistance. She added that CCWater didn't think that measures linked to vulnerability should be linked to financial reward.

Sam said the company had been looking at funneling any reward on this performance measure into support for vulnerable customers.

Martin asked panel members whether they felt comfortable that the company had done enough to understand vulnerability. The consensus was that a lot of work had been done to understand the needs and contexts for vulnerable customers, and the findings mirror what voluntary organisations know themselves.

Sam said the company was already doing a lot in this regard but there was work to be done to raise awareness of the help that's out there for vulnerable customers. The company has a high-level vulnerability strategy in place. There will be a more detailed document that will outline a three-year plan and timelines. Areas of focus would be training, extending services, building partnerships and improving awareness.

5. Online Community Engagement

Sam Ross reported on Incling research that engaged 50 respondents from across the region, via the online community. The consensus was that the company shouldn't be offering support that drives up bills for other customers. People felt that the welfare state should be supporting people through means tested benefits.

70% of customers were on board with an independent panel to assess performance but wanted the company to talk to customers rather than just consultants.

The least popular measure was bill support for vulnerable customers while the most popular was working in partnership.

Martin asked about the sample size and how the respondents were chosen. Sam responded that the research company had made sure the sample was representative of customers across the region.

Gill said that her view of customer engagement by AW overall was that it's been really good and wide-ranging. She acknowledged that customers in vulnerable circumstances were being picked up throughout all the different streams of research. This was then being analysed by an independent person through the synthesis report.

6. Outline Business Plan

Jordan White gave an overview of the company's outline business plan relating to affordability and vulnerability.

He referred panel members to ourplan.anglianwater.co.uk and the Be the Boss campaign that was launching today at a local school.

Vulnerability: P16-17 of the outline plan includes explanation of how the company will support vulnerable customers.

A key part of AW strategy is to get better at identifying when customers are in vulnerable circumstances and stepping in to help in the most effective way, suited to particular circumstances.

During AMP7, the company plans to:

- Make the most of data to help identify customers in vulnerable circumstances
- Build partnerships to help identify and target support for customers in vulnerable circumstances
- Promote support, including through partnerships
- Provide targeted and effective support that's flexible
- Use an independent panel of vulnerability experts to challenge the company

There will be a one-page document on the bespoke performance measure on vulnerability that outlines customer engagement on this. This will be shared via ShareFile. **(Saved in Sharefile under Supporting Material)**

Martin suggested that the wording on building partnerships should be more ambitious (e.g. add word “more” before partnerships). He also said that it may be a bit risky to set up an independent panel if the company’s performance doesn’t measure up.

Jordan responded that the company could have just gone with the quantitative measure rather than qualitative (e.g. using PSR registration as a measure of success), but customers wanted to see more qualitative measures. Through focus groups, the company is looking further at the weighting of the individual elements.

Martin asked panel members for their views on this.

Janet was interested in the definition of “vulnerability experts” and wondered about taking out the word “expert” – this may change the perception of customers engaged and allay fears about costs of a panel like this.

Gill wanted it to be made clear to customers that, regardless of the panel costs, rewards and penalties could have an impact on bills.

Peter thought the general approach was good but wondered about developing a metric around measuring partnership work, in terms of numbers of vulnerable customers identified.

Martin agreed that it would be helpful to see a clear rolling plan with numbers against it on which the independent panel could take a view. Without that, it could just become a talking shop, he feared.

Julie Farrow wanted to see more level of detail in order to assess the proposals.

Affordability: p30 of outline business plan looks at affordability for customers and outlines bill profiles. (There are three options: under first option, bills stay flat; under second two options, bills will increase over 5 years.)

P9 (section 2): sets out the general principle that the company is committed to keeping costs down by finding better and cheaper ways to deliver services.

Company outlines plans to help make bills more affordable by:

- Identifying customers who are struggling to pay and help them find assistance
- Installing meters and promote measured charges
- Funding and operating an assistance fund to help customers in arrears

who've shown willingness to pay.

Action: Sam and Jordan will upload synthesis report, one-pager on performance measure and other background papers on the ShareFile (including panel assessment criteria). **(Synthesis reported saved in Sharefile under Supporting Material)**

SR/JW

7. New Bill Design

Panel members fed back on the company's new bill designs.

Lorraine said she struggled with size of font and faintness of type, but she liked the use of white space

Panel members thought it was good that the main messages were highlighted in bold.

There was a suggestion around the placement of messages around problems with paying. Could this go on the envelope or front page?

Anglian Water contact details could be added to problems with paying details – including an 0800 number.

Martin also highlighted that Civil Legal Advice no longer offer debt advice under legal aid and suggested including CAB national number instead.

8. Summing Up

Next meeting on 25 May from 10-2pm to look at how customer views have been taken into account in Outline Business Plan.