

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

Date: Friday, 23 February 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>Jeff Halliwell – Chair of CEF</p> <p>Gill Holmes – local consumer advocate for CCWater member of CEF and CESG for Anglian Water</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>
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Agenda Items

Action

1. Welcome and introductions

Martin Lord reported that CAB have recently been working with Anglian Water on data sharing.

Gill Holmes reported that CCWater have recently published a report on vulnerability, available here: [Staying afloat](#).

2. Group role and remit

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. Ofwat wants companies to pay particular attention to people in vulnerable circumstances so CEF decided to set up a subgroup to focus on this. CEF is required to provide a report to be submitted to Ofwat at the same time as the final business plan (due on 3 September).

Timelines:

- CEF hopes to see first draft of AW's outline business plan by 6 March (next CEF meeting)
- This will go 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 meeting is 5 June, then 31 July.

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 6 June CEF meeting.

Martin Lord circulated Terms of Reference for the panel and suggested these should be adopted and put on record.

Vicky Anning is writing the report for the CEF and will help to gather views and challenges and write reports for the subpanels and for CEF.

Action: Vicky will circulate to panel questions relevant to vulnerability and affordability in Ofwat's guiding "Aide Memoire".

VA

Gill Holmes sits on AW's Customer Engagement Steering Group (CESG) and has seen all the work that's been done by the company on vulnerability.

Action: Gill would like to have a sheet that summarises work that's been done on vulnerability.

SR

3. Recap on vulnerability strategy and current initiatives at Anglian Water

Sam provided an overview on AW's vulnerability strategy and current initiatives, looking at various definitions of vulnerability and affordability.

Affordability = customer ability to pay water bill

Vulnerability = customers that may need extra support and services

Vulnerability an increasing area of focus for Ofwat, who are looking for:

- Excellent service for all customers
- Effective use of data
- Successful partnerships (with other companies, utilities, 3rd party organisations to identify and assist customers in vulnerable situations)

Metrics (what Ofwat are looking for around vulnerability)

- Percentage of customers satisfied with the service provided
- Percentage of customers aware of non-financial assistance measures offered
- Number and percentage of customers on priority service register (PSR)

There was general discussion around whether there are national benchmarks available for measuring levels of vulnerability. Sam said, because it's a new

performance measure, the company are proposing to develop understanding of the level and nature of vulnerability in the first instance. Findings show that awareness of support for vulnerable customers is low.

Martin asked what AW take up is on the [Priority Services Register](#) (PSR) and whether this group can take a view on it?

Sam said that energy companies have done more work on this and their figure is significantly higher (AW has approx. 13,700 on PSR). AW is looking to align services for water and energy provider so customers are getting the support they need in the event of an incident.

Martin said that the current description doesn't really reflect the transitory nature of vulnerability.

Sam replied that AW's research found that vulnerability is dynamic and not one-dimensional. Anyone may experience vulnerability at any time. This important finding needs to be reflected in the company's business planning.

Martin asked for panel views on AW's definition of vulnerability?

Peter felt it was a sophisticated definition. Janet asked if there was a generational difference in vulnerability – were older people more resentful of asking for help, for example? Martin wondered if there was a generational difference in people being willing to share data for PSR?

Action: Sam said she could pull that data out from case studies

SR

Members suggested reaching out to vulnerable elderly customers through lunch clubs, GP surgeries, local authorities, NHS, DWP. With his DWP hat on, **Action:** Trevor offered to look into taking something forward nationally with ESA recipients.

TE

Sam said AW is keen to interact with NHS to promote support available for vulnerable customers. They are considering including promotions on prescription bags. Company is also looking at training, leaflets available in different languages etc. A leaflet has also been produced in consultation with other utility companies about what to do in an emergency, saving money, national debt lines, social tariffs, energy saving, priority service register. Martin pointed out that Debt Advisory Centre referred to in the presentation is a fee-charging debt service – recommended to either remove it or mention other fee paying services. He suggested leaflet should include CAB, StepChange and National Debt Line.

Action: Sam to feed suggested change back to Utilities Network

SR

Janet thinks leaflet is very comprehensive but is concerned that someone with dementia wouldn't get through all the information.

Martin asked, when looking at the outline Business Plan, would it be fair to make a comment on improving data sharing between AW and other agencies.

Martin said that AW needs to raise its game and be engaging with voluntary sector/financial inclusion partnerships – infrastructure organisations/networks.

Sam said that would be the ideal and any links would be useful. AW has been working with District Councils (e.g. registering people for Assisted Bin Collections on PSR) and a number of Financial Inclusions Partnerships across the region. Looking to reach out to blue badge holders.

In 2017, started to roll out Dementia Friends programme. Working towards becoming a Dementia Friendly organisation with the ambition to roll out the Dementia Friends programme to everyone at AW.

Martin suggested the company should be proud of this and promote what they're doing. It's a really broad range of initiatives and it's hard not to be impressed and reassured – but hard to know how this measures up with other companies.

Trevor: the one way good to measure is to be part of social mobility network group. 97 companies went for it last year. Will send link to apply

TE

4. Company engagement – customers in vulnerable circumstances

Sam talked about three pieces of commissioned customer engagement on vulnerability:

- **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)
- **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).
- **Incling:** online community set up for customers to give views on challenges – invited them to discuss vulnerability covering four key topics.

There was a general discussion about demographics of the online community. Martin pointed out that, by definition, none of these customers would be digitally excluded.

Sam said the company had engaged with vulnerable customers through the Accent and Community Research studies.

Sam highlighted that researchers spent hours going in-depth with each of these families but there is more work to be done. AW has also engaged with professionals engaging with vulnerable groups.

Martin asked if there will be a commitment of resources to increase number of people on PSR?

Sam said the company is working on a realistic and aspirational number for PSR. They have a range of data sharing sources and use a host of information to profile customers to tailor strategies to support them/identify vulnerability (e.g. speech analytic software to identify vulnerability through customer calls). To help the company to understand customer base, can go into level of detail to an area of 40-100 households to look at debt, deprivation etc.

Going into test on Monday, this data will go into a heat map to visualise regions of deprivation- making sure it's mapped correctly and data is robust.

Martin asked about opportunities for sending out bills in hard copy to promote social tariffs

Sam said the company can use the demographics data to target promotion in certain areas but with the use of credit reference agency data we can target more effectively at an individual household level.

SR

Martin would be keen to see plan of what AW proposes to do with the data.

Panel discussed why there's no discount for people signing up to electronic bills, as with other utilities.

Trevor: mentioned scheme called ClickSilver (students teaching older people how to get online)

Sam: AW would be happy to promote initiatives such as ClickSilver. Any links to pilots like this would be great.

5. Vulnerability and the PR19 Business Plan

Jordan White explained that AW need to include at least one bespoke performance commitment (ODI) for addressing vulnerability in the PR19 Business Plan.

AW are looking at one ODI on this (with two elements to it):

- AW would like to see an increase in number of customers on PSR (quantitative)
- An independent panel to scrutinise AW's overall approach to supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances (qualitative)

The proposed ODI would start in April 2020 and include an assessment against five criteria used in a similar incentive in the energy sector: weak, fair, good, excellent etc., with annual assessment.

Scores for each of the elements would be weighted to give an overall "vulnerability measure".

They are proposing this as a financial ODI – but level of performance/payment is in development.

70% of customers look favourably on an independent board that challenges AWs performance. Some customers highlighted that the Panel should reflect customers, not consultants.

Jordan asked how panel members felt the ODI should be weighted?

- 50/50 (between panel or PSR numbers)
- Greater emphasis on one of the two elements

Jeff: this is the kind of question that should come from customer engagement (not from CEF or other panels). This should be done during the focus groups in April.

Gill welcomed the qualitative element. In terms of ODIs that exist at the moment, this is innovative. We don't know what other companies are putting forward. The validity of the ODI will depend upon the quality of the assessment procedure, which needs to be robust and transparent. She suggested there should also be interim reporting so as not to have any surprises at end of year.

Jordan: a strong assurance process would need to sit alongside the Panel assessment.

Jeff asked what opportunity would there be for benchmarking across sectors (energy or other regulated monopolies). Not just looking at AW performance but comparing to others would strengthen innovativeness of AW's offer.

Jeff asked what views there have been gathered on this outside of online community? Concerned that there hasn't been enough consultation of vulnerable community on the panel approach – as online community is intrinsically flawed for this segment of customers. Need assurance on how customer engagement has led to this proposal (golden thread). Also how that would feed into future customer engagement.

SR/JW

Sam: we will engage further with customers as part of business plan consultation. Next piece of engagement will be to make sure we're consulting customers who are digitally disengaged and vulnerable in other ways.

SR/JW

Jeff would like a paper on how AW has engaged with customers to lead to this proposal.

Action: Sam to circulate full Incling report and a summary of the engagement so far and how this has informed AWs performance commitment.

Martin wanted to know at what point the focus groups will see this question. He wanted some assurance that this question would be addressed and would like to see dates for focus group meetings addressing vulnerability.

Jeff asked if this proposal could be shared at broader CEF on 6 March, as part of business plan discussion

Jordan confirmed it would be included as part of the CEF discussion on the Business Plan.

Martin: CEF would continue to have view on this ODI beyond the Business Plan period.

6. Summing up/next steps

Jeff suggested that the panel should meet again between 30 April and 6 June CEF meeting.

If possible, two meeting dates – tentative proposal:

- 16 April to look at customer engagement work to date
- 25 May to look at how customer views have been taken into account in Outline Business Plan

Further information:

- [Ofwat Affordability and Vulnerability Report](#), Feb. 2016 (Gill Holmes has offered to summarise this for the next panel meeting)
- CCWater report, [Staying Afloat](#), Sept. 2017