

YourVoice

Reflecting on United Utilities' performance – 2015-2016

Over the last year we, the YourVoice panel, have built on the work of the Customer Challenge Group and have worked with United Utilities to make sure it delivers water and wastewater services which reflect the priorities of customers and stakeholders across the North West.

We have two roles during the new investment period for 2015-2020. Firstly, to challenge United Utilities to deliver against the promises it made to customers and stakeholders in its business plan and to assess its progress, beginning with 2015-2016. Secondly, to challenge United Utilities in preparing the business plan for 2020-2025 and to make sure this is built from a deep understanding of customer and stakeholder needs. We welcome that this is based on good governance, with direct contact with United Utilities' board.

Every three months throughout 2015-2016, we have received and reviewed progress reports from United Utilities against its customer promises, and the outcomes for customers that those promises are based on. We have also emphasised how important it is for all those who live and work in the North West to be able to easily understand how their company is performing.

Our panel's representatives include independent customer and business representatives and quality and environmental regulators. We are pleased to report that United Utilities' Annual Performance Report accurately reflects its performance.

We also welcome United Utilities' positive response to our suggestion to produce an easy to-read summary for customers to accompany the detailed report. This has gained Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark for clarity, which we support as a way for the company to improve knowledge and understanding for customers and stakeholders and build trust and confidence in the water industry.

United Utilities' performance this year has positives and negatives which have had an effect on the day to-day lives of the people in the North West. We have challenged the company to focus on the improvements it can provide to reduce the negative effect of any problematic areas of its performance. The overall result is a financial reward that the company agreed with Ofwat for this five-year period. This is good for customers as it means the company is delivering benefits overall.

As well as examining United Utilities' performance every three months, we have monitored, reported on and assured stakeholders about many aspects of its performance during the year, including through the use of subgroups. We will create more subgroups where necessary to look in greater detail at the main issues within our wider responsibility. We have also looked at areas where there has been a wider beneficial effect. For example, performance linked to wastewater and bathing-water quality has supported the achievement of the first Blue Flag for the Fylde Coast. We are pleased to note that a wide-ranging partnership, which United Utilities is part of and which we support, has produced this excellent result. Everyone involved will work to achieve further improvements to bathing-water quality so that residents and visitors can enjoy the North West's beaches, and businesses can thrive.

There has been much discussion between us and United Utilities about the overall effect operational issues have on customers. The number of water-quality incidents has been disappointing this year and we expect to see improvements in this area in the future. We were disappointed with the Lancashire water-quality incident in particular, but we acknowledge that the company worked hard to get things back to normal for customers as quickly as it could. United Utilities consulted us following the incident and we are pleased that our views on compensation were fully reflected in the payments it made to customers for the inconvenience they experienced.

Together with United Utilities we are waiting for the outcome of the Drinking Water Inspectorate's report, but have already discussed the actions the company has taken to make sure an incident such as this cannot happen again. We expect this to be a continuing area for us to focus on and we will monitor the company to make sure that the lessons learned are firmly established into its operations.

We have been involved as United Utilities has developed its customer strategy, particularly in its approach to making sure that all customers receive appropriate support, depending on their needs. This includes vulnerable customers. The introduction of Priority Services will mean that more people can receive more tailored help, and is a welcome development.

The challenging set of outcomes that United Utilities must deliver by 2020 will be increasingly difficult for it to achieve, and we recognised this following Ofwat's Price Review. But there will be many benefits for customers, stakeholders and the environment.

We will continue to work with United Utilities to make sure it achieves the benefits for all customers and stakeholders.

If you would like to contact us to raise any issues about United Utilities' performance, or our work, please email us at myview@uuplc.co.uk

Andrea Cook OBE,
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