

# YourVoice

## Reflecting on United Utilities' performance – 2017-2018

The last year has seen the YourVoice panel continue to work closely with United Utilities to make sure they deliver water and wastewater services which reflect the priorities of customers and stakeholders across the North West.

Our panel's representatives include independent customer and business representatives and quality and environmental regulators. By adding representatives from Citizens Advice, Money Advice and the Warrington Disability Partnership to the panel last year, we have greatly improved our insight into issues relating to customers in vulnerable circumstances. This insight is very helpful when challenging the company to improve their involvement with customers from all walks of life.

Members of the panel have two roles over the business-plan period to 2020. Firstly, we challenge United Utilities to deliver the promises they made to customers in their business plan and to monitor their progress and reporting against their performance commitments. Secondly, we challenge United Utilities in preparing the business plan for 2020-2025 to make sure they develop this using a thorough understanding of customer and stakeholder views and needs. To carry out these roles we use subcommittees to look in detail at the main issues we are responsible for reviewing and challenging. We have direct contact with the United Utilities' board and the executive team in this work.

During the year from April 2017 to March 2018 we stepped up the frequency of our review meetings with the company. Every other month, throughout the year, we have received and reviewed progress reports from United Utilities against their customer promises, and their performance commitments for customers. We also emphasised how important it is for all those who live and work in the North West to be able to easily understand how the company is performing.

We are pleased to report that United Utilities' 2017-2018 Annual Performance Report accurately reflects their performance. The company are continuing to produce an easy to-read performance summary, which has gained Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark, and are also publishing extra content on their website, which provides a more interactive digital presentation of the information to help to improve customers' and stakeholders' understanding.

We are encouraged that United Utilities are making concerted efforts to share the main messages from their reporting on social media and using advertising so more people have access to this information. Last year, for example, one set of posts which was targeted to attract online

viewers to detailed information about current performance levels had 10,000 views – a huge achievement. These posts encouraged two-way conversations with customers and generated exchanges on a variety of topics.

In terms of performance during the year, results show both positives as well as negatives, which have affected the day-to-day lives of the people in the North West. We have continued to challenge the company to make improvements where they have not met their targets, for example in the area of water-supply interruptions. Here, the company have bought extra alternative supply vehicles which, together with recent investment in more centrally controlled monitoring technology, were instrumental in helping the company manage and respond to the effect of the major freeze-thaw that took place last winter.

The overall result has been a financial penalty as a result of the outcome delivery incentives (penalty and reward mechanisms) that the company agreed with Ofwat for this five-year period. This reflects the challenging nature of some of the targets and the importance of performance and customer service.

Water quality is very important to United Utilities' customers. The company failed to meet targets in this area in 2017-2018 so have been working closely with the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) on improvements. At a recent YourVoice meeting the DWI told us that they were very pleased with United Utilities' progress in this area by using a water-quality transformation plan. The plan shows the company are successfully delivering improvements at water-treatment works and in the network to meet the increasingly challenging water-quality targets in future years.

We are now closely involved in reviewing and challenging the company's preparations for the next price review, including reviewing the early submissions that they have made on issues such as future costs, future performance commitments, and how their performance during the current period will affect bills in the 2020-2025 period.

We are working with and challenging the company on their strategy for involving customers and the need to link this to the information they hold on customers' issues, complaints and compliments. We also working with them to make sure that they bring this information together effectively into a single view

that is reflected throughout their future plans. Some of this work has been innovative and has really involved customers.

Overall, we feel that over recent years customers have become much better informed and more willing to challenge and demand improvements in service. We are working with United Utilities to provide education and extra information to customers on areas of the company's work, and we will continue to make sure that their plans effectively reflect customers' feedback.

We have also continued to be involved as United Utilities have developed their customer strategy, particularly in their approach to making sure that all customers receive appropriate support, depending on their needs. This includes customers in vulnerable circumstances. The successful take-up of 'priority services' in the year means that more people are now receiving tailored help, which is a welcome development. The affordability and vulnerability subgroup (chaired by disability champion David Thompson, who is also a member of YourVoice) gives us a direct link to this section of our community, and we are sure this will prove invaluable. We were closely involved in the first North West affordability summit, held on 'Blue Monday', as a willing community focusing on poverty in our region and what we and other stakeholders can do to make a difference

We realise the challenging set of outcomes that United Utilities must deliver by 2020 will be difficult to achieve. However, we will be focused on monitoring and challenging the company to deliver these targets to benefit their customers.

If you would like to contact us about United Utilities' performance or our work, please email us at [myview@uuplc.co.uk](mailto:myview@uuplc.co.uk).

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