

Notes of Meeting No.2 of the South East Water CCG  
 Consumer Vulnerability Sub-Group held on  
 30<sup>th</sup> August 2017, at Snodland Head Office



**Present:**

- Zoe McLeod (Chair)
- Janet Hill (JH) (Swale Borough Council)
- Caroline Farquhar (CF) (Citizens Advice)
- Veronica McGannon (VM) (Household Customer)
- Adrienne Margolis (AM) (Household Customer)
- Steve George (SEW)
- Simon Mullan (SEW)
- Shelia Bowdery (SEW)
- Alison Lee (SEW)
- Kathy Dunn (SEW)
- Nicola Blake (NB) (SEW)

**Apologies:**

- Penny Shepherd (PS) (Consumer Council for Water)
- Rupika Madhura (RM) (Economic Regulation Expert)

Agenda Item no.	Notes and Actions	Action	Timescale
1. Introductions	ZM opened the meeting and welcomed members and company representatives, and confirmed apologies had been received from RM and PS.		
2. Minutes and Actions	The Group asked about SEW's outreach activity. SEW explained that they have 12 outreach workers who scope community events. They currently manage to go to most of the events they identify. The purpose of these is to help customers manage their water bills and become more water efficient/answer any questions or queries customers might have/check they are on the right tariff. SG explained that the current approach had been quite organic but they recognised that they may need a more strategic approach. If they identify more events, they will need to start to prioritise these. They recognised that there were likely some gaps in community engagement e.g. they were East centric and had not yet effectively engaged in Aldershot area with Nepalese community. JH suggested speaking to Affinity Water who have similar issues to SEW in Folkestone and Deal. <b>Action:</b> SEW to contact Affinity water, to discuss approaches.	SB	October

	<p>ZM asked whether the third-party referral networks could be provided. SG referred to the third-party contacts paper circulated with the agenda, and this was discussed. ZM asked for a further paper clarifying the organisations that SEW referred customers to for further support. <b>Action:</b> SB to circulate third-part referral groups.</p> <p>JH asked if SEW had a language register of employees. <b>Challenge:</b> Group suggested creating a register of staff and the languages they can speak to help assist customers.</p> <p>CF asked about the support tariff for helping hands numbers and the period of time this is for. The graph needed to be improved to show the time period more clearly. The single room tariff was discussed, and SB advised this is for customers who couldn't go onto a meter, but lived in single room properties with access to shared laundry facilities.</p> <p>The Group saw the company's outreach activity as a real strength that they could build on in their wider engagement plan. ZM asked about the nature of home visits. SEW explained that this had grown out of the Debt Team, which had now become the Customer Care (CC) Team. Around 70% of the visits are to customers in debt. SEW don't collect money but chat with customers about the range of social support and payment options. The CC team focus on the future and what the customer can do rather than the history of the debt which people can get defensive over.</p> <p>ZM asked whether there were support-visit statistics on customers who wanted to engage and would talk to CC team, and those who didn't. <b>Action:</b> SB to categorise visits and attempted/failed visits. Group asked if information on outcomes of visits, e.g. customers entering payment agreements, referrals to other support organisations, etc., was available and could be included.</p>	<p>SB</p> <p>SB</p>	<p>October</p> <p>October</p>
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<p>3. PR19 Update - Vulnerability</p>	<p>SG gave an overview of Ofwat’s PR19 Consultation, focussing on the Vulnerability and Affordability elements. SG confirmed details of the broader consultation and the company’s response would be covered by OM at the next full CCG meeting.</p> <p>AM asked if customers’ bills would be seen as reasonable when SEW jointly billed for Southern as well. SG advised that the combined SEW and Southern Water (SW) bills were the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest in the industry, compared with the combined SEW and Thames Water (TW) bill, which was slightly below the industry average. SEW’s communications were explaining that the joint bill was not increasing charges.</p> <p>VM asked if SEW customers can set up a standing order rather than a DD. SG confirmed customers can pay by any method they choose. SG added that the Company had been on a journey - they were very process driven at first but had now built in much more flexibility. Staff have more autonomy to make decisions on behalf of customers and they offer a wide range of payment options.</p> <p>SG advised Ofwat will be assessing our business plan and that customer engagement was key part. Ofwat will be assessing affordability and vulnerability, and it was agreed that SEW would circulate the consultation appendix. <b>Action</b> SG will circulate the appendix document.</p> <p>SG advised Ofwat will look at how CCG is engaged and challenges in relation to this. CF spoke about how SEW are already thinking of the demographic of customers and the support needed and felt this was a good start.</p> <p>The Group highlighted how important it was to ensure that any measures of effectiveness were measuring outcomes, not outputs e.g. the number of customers offering services under the PSR is more meaningful arguably that just the number of customers on the PSR. Also, it was hard to measure impact when different water companies have such different contexts. There is a need to ensure measures are not counterproductive - incentivising the wrong behaviour. One member highlighted that some energy companies put all customers over the age of 65 on the register which was not effective targeting. <b>Action:</b> SG to circulate CCWater’s impending report on vulnerability.</p>	<p>SG</p> <p>SG</p>	<p>September</p> <p>September</p>
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<p>5. Vulnerability Strategy – Work plan update</p>	<p>SM gave an update on progress towards the company’s vulnerability strategy. He confirmed there were four key elements: knowing our customers; knowing what they needed, delivering services to address those needs; and developing future services. SM advised they will be building on the feedback they receive to move forward, and that actions from the previous meeting were now being used to build a plan. ZM asked SM to consider a fifth element to the strategy, on assessing the effectiveness of the plan. <b>Action</b> - SM is to consider an assessment element for the strategy.</p> <p>KD advised she had been looking at Scottish and Southern Power’s approach. SM advised the company was changing its PSR system codes to align with the energy industry’s approach and would keep informed to help for when we information sharing began. <b>Action:</b> SEW to circulate its intended list of needs codes.</p> <p>ZM advised she had forwarded SG the contact details at Eon. Eon have the customer contact numbers built into their system to identify customers, and track and update them. <b>Challenge:</b> SEW to contact EON and assess whether there was any value in their Care and Assessment Tool.</p> <p>KD advised that WaterUK, the industry trade body, was also working with the energy sector to foster a national approach. ZM asked how this was progressing, and KD confirmed the next workshop with Water UK will be in October/November. At the next meeting ZM would like to see the timelines and options for transferring the data. <b>Action</b> - KD to discuss approach with SM.</p> <p>ZM asked if SEW had prepared a list of questions of what we would like to know from the energy companies. SG agreed this would be good preparation for the exchanges. KD confirmed she was looking at the areas of deprivation and assessing what to investigate. <b>Challenge:</b> SEW to consider what questions they wanted their data mapping to focus on.</p> <p>VM asked whether SEW placed all residents with sheltered housing on its PSR by default. SEW confirmed this was not the case, and that customers were considered on an individual, case-by-case basis, as not all residents in sheltered housing were vulnerable.</p> <p>VM suggested we attend memory cafés and support groups. JH suggested contacting the fire brigade for information due to the number of homes they access. <b>Action</b> – SB to investigate.</p>	<p>SM</p> <p>SG/SM</p> <p>KD</p> <p>SB</p>	<p>TBC</p> <p>October</p> <p>October</p> <p>October</p>
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	<p>ZM asked when SEW hope to have mapped out all the processes for the engagement strategy. SM advised SEW needs to come back with firm proposals and would like feedback on this. SG would like all issues pulled together into a work plan.</p> <p><b>Challenge</b> SEW to develop their strategy for vulnerability engagement. This will be circulated to the Group for challenge - to include timelines to the subgroup – ahead of the next meeting.</p> <p>The next meeting is Friday 13<sup>th</sup> October.</p>		
6. Private session	[text to be added]		

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