



Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP)

21 October 2021

Virtual meeting via MS Teams – from 10:00am

Present: Steve Crabb* (Chair) (SC)

Alison Thompson*, Independent (AT)

Simon Bland*, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council (Deputy Chair) (SB)

Martin Hurst*, Independent (MH)

Helen Mouldsley*, Independent (HM)

Amy England*, Independent (AE)

Alice Laycock - CCW Policy Manager (AL)

Ian Cain – SES Water Chief Executive Officer (IC)

Kate Thornton – SES Water Chief Customer Officer (KT)

Dan Lamb – SES Water Head of Retail Services (DL)

Rob Beasley – SES Water Interim Head of Communications (RB)

Katie Mason – SES Affordability & PS Lead

Apologies: Chris Hoskins*, Nutfield Conservation Society (CH)

Tom Perry* - Environment Agency (TP)

Deborah Jones* - Citizens Advice Mole Valley (DJ)

Jaime Ali*, Independent (JA)

Janet Wright*, Independent (JW)

Cate Searle – SES Water Customer Experience Manager (CS)

*** CSP member**



Chairman's welcome

The register of interests had been circulated prior to the meeting and no conflicts identified.

SC thanked CSP members for their feedback on the summer consultation and thanked AT for allowing CSP to adopt the format of the ESP's challenge and action logs.

Call listening

Two calls were played, one each from water and billing. Both calls showed problems with customer communications and follow-through resulting in customer dissatisfaction. KS said that both calls had been played to senior management as indicative of an underlying problem with consistency.

Aptumo update

DL provided an update on the Aptumo roll-out, which went live in late September. Only five pieces of data out of 67 million had failed to transfer across during tests, so go-live approval was given. Some teething problems had been identified as teams familiarised themselves with the new systems, and some resulting from differences between the data points used by the old system and those used by Aptumo – for example, obviously excessive bills being generated in some cases. Both usability of the new system and the quality of data being produced were very pleasing. A problem highlighted by MH, who received five bills in quick succession, was not due to an Aptumo-related system failure but to a poorly designed process which was now operating correctly thanks to Aptumo.

MH asked what controls were in place to identify similar problems in future.

AL reported that CCW had not received any complaints about Aptumo to date.

KS said that SESW were receiving calls relating to bills etc generated by Aptumo but no actual complaints to date.

AT asked if the dashboard was giving staff a sufficiently granular view of jobs to make a real difference to service quality (DL said that early indications in this regard were very positive).

SC asked what controls had enabled SESW to intercept excessively high bills given that the bills had been generated. DL said that there were checks at a number of stages in the process to identify obviously anomalous bills before they reach the printers.

IC emphasized that the initial roll-out of Aptumo had gone very well from the company's perspective; it was a key element of SESW's digital customer-centric programme. Learnings from Australia (where the system was rolled out first) had been applied very carefully.

Business update

KT presented on performance against the company's five pledges. Taste, odour etc was off target by a small amount (in some cases it was not possible to identify the underlying cause for customer concerns). The company is over-delivering on support for customers in financial hardship. CMeX, DMeX, void properties and PCC commitments were all off target.

SB asked how SESW could collaborate with local authorities and other organisations to try to identify customers who might need extra help. KT said this was something that was being looked into.

Employee engagement scores are very positive in the latest survey.

AT asked about opportunities to discuss PCC during SESW's current door-knocking campaign.



IC explained that Moodys had readjusted the company's financial rating from 'negative' to 'stable' following detailed discussions.

Purpose update

KT said that the plan was to re-engage with employees on Purpose in November, to both embed it and ensure that it informs future business plan delivery. The company would also need to think about how to bring the new Purpose to life for customers. RB would play a key role in this work.

MH expressed disappointment that more progress had not been made on Purpose since the development work was done on this. He hoped to see more evidence that it had the chief executive's support and that there was real momentum behind it. It needed to run through the whole organisation's DNA, not be an arm's-length positioning statement. Other water companies were more advanced in this regard.

KT and IC assured CSP that the senior management team were totally committed to the new Purpose and it would be the central focus of PR24 planning.

SC asked for an update at the next panel meeting, and for a timeline of customer engagement work planned (and forecast) against WRMP, PR24, and BAU customer engagement, to include Purpose as a key activity line.

IC said that the environmental challenge is potentially the greatest one facing the company today; SESW would need to lift up its comms in future if it was going to get the necessary traction with customers to drive behavioural change (as well as delivering in other ways). The company currently had five different messages on every vehicle; it needed radical simplification and focusing.

Regulatory update

SC gave an update on SWSW's letter to Ofwat and on forthcoming Ofwat positioning paper on the future of customer engagement, which would include workshops with water companies and CCGs/customer panels.

CMeX deep dive

KT presented on the latest CMeX data. The company has moved up from 16th to 11th overall on CMeX in the last quarter. There is no complacency – there is a lot of work still to do. YTD, the company is currently 15th out of 17. The aim is to get to mid-table by the end of the year and top quartile by the end of the AMP.

MH pointed out that two of the top four companies are water-only.

SC asked if the primary reason for billing dissatisfaction was the size of bills (quantitative) or the ease of customer engagement on billing issues (qualitative). KT said there were a number of drivers, of which the qualitative side was clearly important.

MH said that great work had been done on root cause analysis, and CSP had previously been assured that these would be addressed once IT issues were sorted. Would we now be seeing real progress and how would this be measured (eg through pulse surveys)

HM observed that jargon around CMeX can obscure the central issues. KT said she would look at more rounded and accessible indicators of customer satisfaction and experience going forward.



KT shared an analysis of the main responses from customers to a survey asking what the company could do better, of which communication, resolution and follow-through were particular stand-outs.

IC suggested there was a gap in what CMeX could tell the company about the drivers of reputation, which could usefully be explored.

Support for financially vulnerable customers

KM gave an update on work to identify and target support at customers who are at risk of struggling to pay or falling into debt.

Challenges this winter are expected to include job losses due to end of furlough, cut in Universal Credit and rising prices in essential items like energy.

To support customers at risk, the company was stepping up partnership working and signposting and referrals to sources of support, help and guidance, as well as advertising using multiple channels to increase awareness of the support available. This included community activities, many of them in-person.

AL said that South East Water had been working with local authorities to identify customers eligible for the PSR and asked if this was something SESW had been considering. KM said it wasn't currently happening but it was being considered.

MH asked if there was a cap on the number of customers who would be considered for the social tariff. KT said there was no cap.

SC asked what data the company had on the payment methods used by customers at risk of financial hardship (eg cash/cheque v direct debit) and whether bills could be used to communicate help options to customers.

KT said CCW had recommended advertising help on the outside of bill envelopes, and one water company was trialling this; the company would be monitoring this.

'Precautionary boil notice event'

KT gave an update on the customer communications campaign which followed the discovery of a potential indicative e-coli sample at Westwood Treatment Works.

The 'go' decision for the boil notice was made at 4.30pm and comms began shortly afterwards. The first calls from customers came in at 5.40pm. Volunteers were dispatched with notices and bottled water for customers in vulnerable circumstances.

Two major issues were identified as learning opportunities:

- Ensure there are multiple points of contact at key stakeholders such as CCW in case the initial contact can't be reached
- Anticipate extraordinary traffic on digital/social media in case of sites/channels crashing

A third learning was around postcode accuracy.

AE suggested that the company use Facebook as well as Twitter in future.

SC stressed the importance of maintaining both digital and analogue channels to ensure that all customers have an opportunity to access key messages. Plus the need for prioritization of the most vulnerable (eg centenarians over 65 year olds with no obvious vulnerabilities other than being over pension age).

MH asked if a detailed lessons learned would be shared, and if there were any plans to take those lessons back to affected communities for feedback.



SC asked if SESW could err on the side of over-disclosure in future on things like the website crashing or multiple bills being generated by Aptumo, so there were fewer surprises for CSP as a result of disclosures by members rather than the company.

Update on universal metering programme

This update was deferred due to lack of time, but a number of comments were made regarding this issue.

IC said that the UMP needed to be seen as an opportunity to engage with customers about PCC, not just about accurate billing.

MH said if you get those things right, CMeX should follow. He also pointed out that Sutton was becoming the borough of choice for people moving to Britain from Hong Kong; this was an important demographic trend worth considering in engagement planning.

Any other business

- **Update from ESP** – AT updated CSP on discussions at the October ESP, including Henrietta's climate change conversation framework and climate change adaptation.
- CSP members expressed a wish to hold a future CSP at Bough Beech (perhaps Spring 2022).

Next meeting 26 January 2022