

Challenge Questions Tracker



The Challenge Tracking system will hold a comprehensive set of questions the ICG will ask on behalf of customers, raised during meetings between the ICG and Affinity Water.

Questions will be categorised into: • **Ways of Working** • **Proposed Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)** • **Research & Insight/Business Plans**

Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)- Our Promise

- Resilient** - We know that having a safe and reliable supply of water is fundamental to the good health of every individual and we will prioritise asking questions to ensure that everyone can maintain confidence in the security of this supply now and in the future.
- Resourceful** - We will keep asking questions that encourage the company to put waste reduction at the heart of their plans, demonstrating that they are reducing leakage while supporting citizens to minimise water wastage at home.
- Protective** - We will uphold your expectation that the water company should play their part in looking after local rivers and streams so that future generations can continue to enjoy them. We also agree that your water company should behave in ways that are environmentally responsible as a business.
- Innovative** - We will celebrate and promote all aspects of innovation designed to improve the lives of the citizens the company serves.
- Affordable** - We will look carefully at bills and support options to ensure that charges are affordable for everyone and that there is help available for anyone who needs it whenever they need it.
- Caring** - We will travel alongside everyone who needs extra support and consider how the company can improve the enhanced range of services that some people might need additionally from their water company.
- Inclusive** - We recognise that everyone has their own preferred way to communicate, and we will help ensure that all paths of access are open whether online, on phone or by mail, taking account of multi-language needs.
- Responsive** - We understand that sometimes you might want to contact your water company with a query or complaint, and we will keep working with the company to ensure that you can do that quickly, easily, and pleasantly.

Topic of challenge (Ways of working, KLOE, Research & Insight/Business Plans)	Meeting Date	ICG Question	Affinity Water Response
Affordable - Customers need affordable bills, and some customers need financial assistance	18-Jul-22	Following an outline of the current drought position, that included a discussion on the possible requirement for Temporary Usage Bans over the winter, members asked how the company plans to communicate a need for any TUB effectively to consumers during a	The company defines 'affordability' or 'financial vulnerability' for household customers as the ability to pay the water bill without causing additional financial stress or hardship. Our customers may experience an 'event' such as a loss of income or increased expenditure that can cause financial stress and/or reduce the ability to pay their water bill. The event can be a combination of events and or a single significant event and our customers can go through the affordability lifecycle at different rates and at different times depending on their situation. We recognise this with our different payment schemes, tariffs and ways to pay.
Affordable - Customers need affordable bills, and some customers need financial assistance	18-Jul-22	Will the company commit to a programme of support that will ensure that no customer will have to live in water poverty (as per the CCW definition)?	We agree with the definition of water poverty as a Household who spend more than 5% of their income on water. Using data from the CEPA study and analysis completed in 2020, we understand that c.50,000 customers in our region would meet this definition. Our social tariffs already support c.100,000 customers. We accept that there will be some customers who meet the definition and are within the 50,000 segment that currently aren't in receipt of support. We will commit to further work to ensure that we maximise the number of customers supported who meet the definition.
Affordable - Customers need affordable bills, and some customers need financial assistance	18-Jul-22	How soon can such a programme begin given that the cost of living crisis is immediate?	We continue to promote a broad range of help and support schemes for customers impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Many of these schemes are already setup and available for customers 1. Payment breaks and breathing space 2. Reduced payment arrangements agreed based on customer affordability 3. Social Tariffs – Water Sure and cross-subsidy for an additional c.35K customers onto the low-income tariff 4. Water Direct scheme (Data sharing with DWP is awaiting final approval from DWP) 5. Crisis Fund – reducing customer arrears and clearing historic debt 6. Payment matching will commence during 2023/24 Additional support in the form of a water poverty 'voucher' (discount off bill) will be rolled out in 2023/24. This is proposed to provide c.£50* off the bill (*amount to be agreed). This support is expected to commence early in 2023/24, ready for annual bills
Affordable - Customers need affordable bills, and some customers need financial assistance	18-Jul-22	When will we receive a full report on the potential impacts and mitigations of a move to a national social tariff?	The move to a national social tariff with consistent eligibility criteria is planned for 1st April 2025. We understand that such a new scheme requires primary legislation which is subject to Parliamentary timetables. We do not currently know when the full details of any scheme, how it will operate and what it means for each company, will be confirmed. Accordingly, we are not in a position where we can make an assessment and unable to provide a date when we will be able to fulfil this.
Affordable - Customers need affordable bills, and some customers need financial assistance	18-Jul-22	Will the company research alternative progressive tariff options that will seek to address issues of inequitable affordability and, potentially, demand?	The company is planning to introduce a trial tariff which intends to make better distinction between essential and discretionary water use. This tariff design would reduce the price of water used for essential purposes, assisting affordability, whilst ensuring that customers with high discretionary use make a greater contribution towards the overall costs of providing water services than today. The trial intends to evidence the benefits of this tariff design for affordability and demand management, as well as allowing the company to learn and gain experience of operating new (to the UK) types of tariff. There are several detailed questions to resolve to develop and implement the trial and whilst we plan to commence 1st April 2023, we may need further time and commence part way through the next charging year, for example 1st July. Aside from tariff trial, for 2023/24's existing tariffs the company is considering adjusting the balance of fixed versus volumetric charges which would promote affordability amongst (typically) single occupiers. It also plans to return revenue over recovery from 2021/22 to customers in a targeted way to provide bill assistance to customers identified by the company as at risk and for customer cases referred to us by third party agencies. Such a scheme would make full use of the c.£1.5m remaining capacity to cross-subsidise, as supported by our 2019 and subsequent customer research. The company intends to publish further details of its proposals and consult with customer representatives on its plans in October 2022.
Affordable - Customers need affordable bills, and some customers need financial assistance	18-Jul-22	Does the company have a model for projecting future numbers for households at risk of water poverty and a corresponding plan to mitigate and support?	The company modelling currently projects future volumes households who may struggle to make payments and the Impact that this may have on bad debt. Whilst this gives an indication on changes to bad debt and arrears, it does not predict individual customers who may be impacted by financial hardship in the future. Our plans are to develop such models using credit reference agency data. This will allow be more predictive in terms customers who need help and support with affording their bill
Affordable - Customers need affordable bills, and some customers need financial assistance	18-Jul-22	How will the company continue to improve ways of communicating eligibility for and easing access to financial support?	We will continue to use a multi-channel approach to improve ways of communicating with customers around affordability help and support. Whilst direct communications will account for the majority of customer comms, work with community partners, other utilities and providers will allow a more joined-up approach, share best practice and joint communications around access for support. •New proposals for customer bills for the next Financial Year were presented along with mitigations for the significant rise due to inflation. Members are very supportive of the intention to prioritise those customers who are at risk of water poverty and commend this approach for future work. This aligns with findings from research on willingness to contribute to social tariff funding that was completed for PR19. •Members will welcome the opportunity to challenge on the plan for communicating changes to bills and would ask the company to locate latest data (from CCW?) on the average time customers spend looking at bill information when considering design for subsequent discussions with ICG regarding best practice on bill messaging - especially re ease of reading and understanding key messages

Resilient -Customers expect their water supply to be clean and reliable now and in the future	18-Jul-22	Sustainable Abstraction is one of the company's identified 3 Golden Threads. How will the company demonstrate that they have a resourced and planned programme of work to deliver – 7.3% reductions in abstraction?	We have an established sustainability reductions programme board as part of our governance framework. Project and programme delivery are tracked monthly through the programme board and by our Investment Programme Team. We have recently refreshed our programme board format to incorporate all programmes within our Environmental Enhancement Portfolio. The programme of asset modifications and network reinforcement is well underway to make the necessary changes to our network and enable the sustainability reductions. We have installed 16km of new pipeline and are working to install a further 2km this financial year. A further 4km of Supply 2040 has also been installed, with the final connection on schedule for May 2023. Work is also underway on the construction of the Sundon conditioning plant and this is scheduled for completion in Spring 2024, ahead of the sustainability reductions implementation.
Resilient -Customers expect their water supply to be clean and reliable now and in the future	18-Jul-22	Part of this will rely on a substantial reduction in PCC usage (to 129 pd) and a business use reduction of 2.5%. In PR19 there was not a convincing plan of action to achieve reductions for these measures and it has proved impossible to deliver the ambitions.	Our action plan to deliver AMP7 PCC reductions consists of 3 strategic areas. These are: 1.to understand and manage household customer consumption and communicate with our customers and build advocacy 2.to increase our meter penetration 3.to influence sustainable customer behavioural change Each area includes activities that make up our action plan to reduce customer demand in AMP7. We have updated the Environment Agency on progress with our plan following in our response to a query on our Annual Return 2022. We are also routinely updating Defra and our regulators at our 6 monthly WRMP review meetings. *NB Affinity Water ICG has an additional remit to sign off formally a series of gateways for the bespoke Performance Commitment for 8 EIP pilot projects agreed for AMP 7.
Research & Insight/Business Plans	18-Jul-22	Ofwat have now published their consultation paper for PR24 Methodology. Does this align with the company's expectations for research & engagement?	The overall methodology has been what we had expected to see. The team is very involved in the collaborative work nationally with Ofwat and CCW.
Research & Insight/Business Plans	18-Jul-22	How will the company propose to organise the 'open challenge' sessions that are suggested might be mandated nationally? How will the ICG be invited to be involved given that they are neither directly stakeholder nor customer representatives?	We are still considering this and have asked Ofwat for more clarification regarding whether these will be set out in terms of methodology. The company had planned to run some citizen jury activities so this may overlap or compliment.
Research & Insight/Business Plans	18-Jul-22	How will members be invited to comment on the proposals for key research pieces?	We will circulate materials when available
Research & Insight/Business Plans	18-Jul-22	Please can all research proposals provide context up front so members can be clear on the question that is to be answered?	Noted
Research & Insight/Business Plans	18-Jul-22	Please can we see a timetable for expected invitations to review proposals so that members can plan accordingly?	Noted – the next work will be the valuations – once timetable is confirmed we will let the ICG know
Research & Insight/Business Plans	18-Jul-22	How will the company identify, research and invite challenge on any Bespoke Performance Commitments (noting there will be only 2 or 3)? •The ICG Chair will now have regular meetings with Sia Partners to oversee the independence of their approaches to assurance, to work out how to include a section on how challenge is welcomed by the company and how this contributes to an improvement culture and to align on KLOE. •NB CCW are commissioning and independent audit of all companies' challenge arrangements (incl ICG but also noting Sia work). This is due to begin in Autumn 2022.	The first phase will be through the valuations work – to let ICG know when materials are developed
Resilient -Customers expect their water supply to be clean and reliable now and in the future	26-Sep-22	Following an outline of the current drought position, that included a discussion on the possible requirement for Temporary Usage Bans over the winter, members asked how the company plans to communicate a need for any TUB effectively to consumers during a period of possibly high rainfall?	We are preparing for the possible TUB on 2 levels – firstly a highly tactical level focussing on the TUB itself and secondly on a strategic level incorporating a wider story about how, by focussing on simplicity and sustainability, we balance the needs of people and the environment to help sustain life in our regions. The latter involves development through an agency and media spend. In both approaches we would seek to deliver consistent messages across colleague (internal comms), corporate (public and stakeholder relations) and consumers. To achieve this we have formed a communications group which sits each week to traffic requests for communications through a filter of strategic imperatives and determines what we communicate and how we do this. The issue of managing communication of a TUB when it is cold, raining and seemingly awash with water is one that is tricky and requires education of the broad consumer base around the water cycle and particularly how Affinity Water abstracts water from groundwater sources. We are working quickly to assemble what a tactical campaign could look like with the aim of deploying this by December and continuing the education through into the new year. One of the keys to success in this campaign is the early start, allowing us to educate and inform which would then mean that a TUB imposition is not a surprise and whilst not welcomed is at least understood.
Innovative - Customers expect public service companies to give back to the communities they serve.	26-Sep-22	The company presented some further proposals for EIPs. Members agreed that these did not meet the threshold for gateway sign off.	Innovation and collaboration are at the heart of how we are building a more resilient and sustainable future. It is one of the ways we are addressing water sector challenges such as climate change, population growth and rising expectations of our customers. In in APM7 we have a unique opportunity to test new approaches and methodologies to learn fast and scale up innovative ideas in the future gathering evidence and trialling delivery methods. Environmental Innovation Projects (EIP) present us with this opportunity to listen to the voice of the customer and test best value solutions, with help and assurance from our Independent Challenge Group (ICG). We have welcomed the ICG feedback. When projects are ready to be presented for assurance at each gateway stage (scope, business case and completion) relevant information will be circulated and presented to the ICG. Affinity Water will ensure that the projects are ambitious by identifying contribution of EIPs towards Ofwat's innovation themes and outcomes as set out in 'UK 2050 Water Innovation Strategy' published back in 2020 for the water sector.
Innovative - Customers expect public service companies to give back to the communities they serve.	26-Sep-22	There have been several changes to the leadership of these projects since their inception. It is now unclear who is leading the projects. How does the company plan to convince the ICG that they continue to remain ambitious about these excellent opportunities to pilot innovative ideas?	Innovation activity is governed in Affinity Water in the following way: All innovations and ideas coming into Affinity Water (either from an external or internal sources), are assessed by the Head of the relevant Department, the Innovation Manager and then presented to Innovation Steering Group (ISG). Innovation activities are sponsored by Director of Asset Strategy and Capital Delivery, SP. A quarterly Innovation Steering Group meets to provide strategic oversight of the ambition, direction of travel and delivery progress on innovation projects as follows. The roles and responsibilities together with assurance level were presented to the ICG. In order to keep delivering ambitious projects that satisfy ICG we propose that innovation aspect is articulated well for any future EIPs together with anticipated benefits for customers and/or environment. We will map the following anticipated outcomes against each project to provide a line of sight on what is expected in advance: •Provide the services society needs, expects and values (relevant to customer) •Provide clean water for all (relevant to customer) •Protect and enhance natural systems (benefit the environment) •Deliver resilient infrastructure systems (relevant to customer) •Achieve carbon neutrality (benefit the environment) •Take a whole life approach to responsible consumption and production •Enable diverse future-ready people and partnership working

<p>Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full</p>	<p>26-Sep-22</p>	<p>Customer satisfaction ratings are broadly mid-pack in the performance tables but the recent CCWater complaints report indicates that there are some areas where significant improvements could be made. What are the company's improvement plans?</p>	<p>In regard to the recent CC Written complaint report finding, we recommend caution when interpreting as Written complaints only accounts for 22% of our complaints. The report omitted Telephone and Social Media complaints which have both seen a dramatic reduction since the start of 21/22. CCW made the decision not to include Telephone complaints due to the reporting accuracy across the sector, with an industry score of 82% vs 93% for Written complaints. However, a recent independent audit of our Telephone complaints recorded an accuracy rate of 90%. Therefore, to present a full picture of our complaint performance we believe the report should have also included Telephone complaints.</p> <p>Although our volumes of written complaints per 10k properties have increased by +14.0% year-on-year, with a significant proportion due to the Universal Metering Programme, which the other water companies are not adopting or implementing so rigorously. It is widely acknowledged the UMP programme will result in complaints due to the mandatory requirement.</p> <p>Although we recognise and are disappointed to record an increase in written complaints per 10k properties from 12.4 in 20/21 to 14.1 in 21/22, however, we are encouraged with the improvements made, as reflected on comparison with 19/20 where we registered 15.6 complaints per 10k properties. This improvement in written complaints is also acknowledged against the significant increase of UMP installations, with a +122% uplift on 19/20 installation volumes.</p>
<p>Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full</p>	<p>26-Sep-22</p>	<p>C-Mex scores are in decline for Affinity but also for all companies. Why is this and how can they be addressed?</p>	<p>There is a consensus across the industry and wider service sector that there is a shift in customer attitudes following the pandemic, with factors including political uncertainty, post Brexit implications, the conflict in Ukraine and the Cost of Living crisis impacting how customers feel about and what they expect from their service providers. Research conducted through our own Water Community on what is regarded a good customer service showed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Participants expressed negative experiences of call centres in general, some feel as though they are less patient since the pandemic due to more stress. However, those who had called an Affinity contact centre had positive experiences. There was a lot of praise for the helpful and friendly staff, as well as the expertise and care they demonstrated when answering questions. •When calling the contact centre, participants want to know what number they are in the queue. Participants appreciate a concise menu that does not require them to press multiple buttons before getting through to a staff member. •Online support is less trusted with urgent matters as participants question whether their query will be dealt with by a real person or AI.
<p>Research & Insight/Business Plans</p>	<p>26-Sep-22</p>	<p>The company presented the new customer insight tool called Qualtrics. Members were impressed with the capabilities of this tool and asked for this to become a standing item on the agenda in order that insights can be shared as they arise.</p> <p>How does the company plan to use Qualtrics as part of the customer engagement and research programme that will drive business planning for both future and ongoing improvement?</p>	<p>The Voice of the Customer is a key pillar of our customer engagement strategy, enabling conversational analytics to supercharge insight to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Our vision is to enable the business to better understand how our customers feel about their experiences with us, by shining a light on the impact of every interaction and touchpoints they have with us, both in isolation and collectively. Prior to launching the programme, we had rich data on the "what", but not as comprehensive insights on the "why", and the time and effort required to deliver was not only prohibitive but would still be insufficient for us to achieve our ambitions.</p> <p>The programme will help cement a customer-centric approach across the company by enabling better decisions through a clearer understanding of customer needs & wants. It places the voice of our customers at the centre of our business, and identify the gaps in our current customer experiences to enable improvements in the moments that matter to them. It also empowers the business to better understand, act & evaluate through a comprehensive and joined-up view of our customer interactions then where & when to interject.</p> <p>Although the programme is still within the implementation phase, it is already delivering advanced analytical & data visualisation capabilities, to combine all customer conversations from call listening and digital posts to survey responses, then apply speech & text analytics to tell our customer stories. Additional implementation includes an automated quality management functionality (QMS) and agent coaching, along with additional surveys across all contact channels providing always-on and ad hoc listening.</p> <p>The platform enables a better understanding of our customers and what they need from us by providing a single view of our customers through multiple channel listening, bespoke surveys and improved analytics, offering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •the ability to combine, categorise and analyse data from voice call listening, social media, webchat, email, complaints and survey responses. •advanced NLP (Natural Language Processing) to categorise key words, phrases and themes, with high-quality analysis delivered through user-friendly and configurable dashboards. •an automated quality assurance programme (QMS) with intelligent scoring of every interaction and agent coaching. •in-house easily configurable surveys, sent via all channels of communication with manual or bespoke triggers, allowing us to ask the right questions at the right time. •ability to join-up and clearly understand our customers' views per process & journey, drilling down to customer segment, water region, usage behaviour etc. •the ability to plug-in supplementary data feeds for richer insights.
<p>Research & Insight/Business Plans</p>	<p>26-Sep-22</p>	<p>How will insights taken from Qualtrics be used in evidence for PR24 Business Plans and how will they be assured?</p>	<p>Customer feedback and insight reports are incorporated within the "What Customers Wants" document which aggregates and evaluations all our sources of customer satisfaction research and is used in evidence within the PR24 programme.</p> <p>As the scope for including our own customer research in the development of Performance Delivery Incentives is limited (due to Ofwat and CCWater collaborative research), we will primarily be using this information to help support the development of our 'enhancement' business cases (i.e. where we are delivering statutory environmental improvement requirements) and investment cases that are 'discretionary' (i.e. where there isn't a statutory driver but a strong cost-beneficial reason to invest).</p>
<p>Research & Insight/Business Plans</p>	<p>26-Sep-22</p>	<p>How will the views of customers living with different vulnerabilities be assessed?</p>	<p>Through regulatory reporting and CSAT targets for both financially and non-financially vulnerable customers. With key word alerts and bespoke dashboards to enable analysis with actionable insights to inform the development of tailored customer experiences.</p>
<p>Research & Insight/Business Plans</p>	<p>26-Sep-22</p>	<p>Can the tool help to highlight the views of harder to reach/traditionally under represented groups?</p>	<p>The challenge is that underrepresented and non-engaged groups historically are unlikely to engaged with us through any form of standardised surveying platform, therefore we are making additional proactive surveys in order to reach out to customers who have not contracted us.</p>
<p>Research & Insight/Business Plans</p>	<p>26-Sep-22</p>	<p>Ofwat will publish their final PR24 Methodology in December 2022 and national guidance for Affordability & Acceptability Testing should be available in early November 2022. This may include guidance for ICGs on their role in challenging companies in respect of this research.</p> <p>The PR24 Methodology may also include proposals for 'open challenge' sessions and it is understood that ICGs would be expected to be involved closely with these.</p> <p>Otherwise, the company had been planning to appoint an independent consultant to assure the quality of the overall research programme. This has not been possible so far. Can the company offer an update to members in respect of their plans for the assurance of high-quality research and engagement with customers for the PR24 Business Plan?</p>	<p>We are currently developing our 'Strategic Assurance Framework' for the price review that will provide an overview of all the individual elements of assurance required for the business plan submission. Any assurance we procure to assure the quality of the overall research programme will need to be integrated into the overall Strategic Assurance Framework'.</p> <p>We have informally asked for quotations for customer research and engagement assurance from SIA Partners (who have previously provided assurance in this area for us). The proposed cost of the work as it stands is not feasible within budgetary constraints and would not offer value for money for customers. We will revisit the scope of the assurance work as part of the Strategic Assurance Framework development and in light of the Final Methodology requirements (published in December 22). We anticipate being able to update the ICG on the approach to assurance in early 2023.</p>

Research & Insight/Business Plans	21-Nov-22	Company confirmed that 'What Customers Want' V2 will be completed by end November. Please can this be shared with ICG members once available?	Papers provided for January 2023 meeting
Research & Insight/Business Plans	21-Nov-22	Qualtrics (real time platform to track customer sentiment) is also now up and running. Can the company explain how it plans to establish which topics they plan to track where sentiment can inform company priorities both short (e.g. intel on leakage) and long term (e.g. environmental concerns in specific geographies)?	Using an extremely rigorous and robust methodology we have previously identified and prioritised the areas where we need to improve customer satisfaction and experiences. We have triangulated 3 primary datasets (reasons for contacts to AWL including voice and digital contacts, customer surveys results run by Affinity Water and C-MeX surveys). Analysing and correlating over 390k contacts to Affinity Water to identify the areas that should receive the greatest focus to improve customer satisfaction. The datasets and analysis are refreshed and reviewed quarterly. The analysis identified 7 core processes with Leaks ranking the highest. Workshops have been carried-out to deep-dive into problem areas, and subsequent improvement plans have been created led by the Customer Experience team. The introduction of the Qualtrics platform now allows us to enhance this methodology and increase the richness of this analysis. By taking the un-structured conversational data and structuring for analysis we are able to better understand in real-time the biggest issues facing our customers and respond accordingly. The 7 core processes, along with a further 23 processes (identified to have a lower priority due to higher customer experience scores and lower volumes) are identified within the Qualtrics platform. However, this is now enhanced with both customer sentiment and customer effort scores to provide a deeper understanding of the issues. The platform is constantly refreshed to prioritise the core processes and will also flag new or emerging issues raised by our customers which will be reflected in our priority ranking.
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	Appropriate Timeliness 1. Do you know how long is it acceptable to customers to wait in a phone queue? 2. Do you then track performance against this measure?	1. Research suggests that 70% of customers expect their calls to be answered within 30 seconds 2. Yes we provide weekly and monthly reporting to the Affinity Water Senior Leadership Team and Executive on telephone answer rates, along with response times for social media (including WhatsApp, email, letter and customer complaints).
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	1. Do you know how long is it acceptable to customers to wait for chat box replies? 2. How do you know if customers are satisfied with phone call or the chat box responses? 3. Do you know drop-out rates for telephone waiters and chat waiters?	1. Previous research has shown the optimum time customers expect to wait is between 1-2 minutes, achieving the highest CSAT. We are currently carrying out research through our Online Water Community to understand the acceptable response times for Telephone and Live Chat 2. At the end of every call, the agent will ask the customer if they are happy with the experience they have received and record it. Where they are not satisfied, it is recorded as a complaint. 3. Our current call drop-out rate is 23% YTD. At the start of the financial year it was recorded at 11% but has been increasing over the summer months and is widening, due to the hot and cold weather incidents which caused disruption to services. We implemented an emergency recovery plan for the call centre during this period, bringing additional call handling employees online and have seen a decline in call drop out times in recent months.
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	1. Is there an emergency pathway for anyone requiring urgent assistance? 2. How do you train and monitor your advisors to be empathetic?	1. Yes, all customers on the Priority Services Register that call any of our main lines (Billing, Debt, OCC) are given preferential treatment in the IVR to escalate them to the front of the queue. 2. All advisors receive training on using empathy and empathetic language as part of their induction with Affinity Water. Specifically, we train advisors to understand the difference between Empathy and Sympathy, how they can apply Empathy to their job roles, and what conversations with our customers/colleagues may need the use of empathy. We also train advisors how to show empathy by using appropriate Questioning and Listening skills, and the LAURA model, to handle challenging conversations. Advisors also have access to an Empathetic Language hand-out, with examples of phrases to use, to help them continue applying Empathy during conversations
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	How do you train and monitor your advisors to spot and react to specific needs that may require tailored approaches, for example, neuro-diverse or neuro-impaired customers? How do you train and monitor your advisors to spot financial vulnerability and direct to relevant assistance programmes?	Financial Hardship/Vulnerability is covered in our Serving Priority Customers training module for all advisors. This focuses on the impact financial hardship/vulnerability causes and how Affinity Water/external organisations can provide support to those affected but does also discuss triggers that advisors may hear to indicate the need for additional support. At the end of this course, advisors are told where to sign-post customers if they feel additional support is needed – including organisations that specialise in finance. Our Affordability training module also covers spotting financial hardship/vulnerability and how to direct to relevant assistance programmes. This module teaches advisors to understand what can cause financial hardship/vulnerability and how a customer might indicate financial difficulty. It also covers topics around how this may impact the customer, handling challenging conversations, how Affinity Water can offer additional assistance and where to sign-post customers if they feel additional support is needed.
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	How do you train and monitor your advisors to spot non-financial vulnerability and direct to relevant assistance programmes?	Our Serving Priority Customers module covers this in-depth. This module teaches advisors to understand the difference between short and long-term vulnerability, how 'triggers' may be used to indicate they may need additional support, the Priority Services Register and how this is of benefit to our customers, how Affinity Water can offer additional assistance and where to sign-post customers if they feel additional support is needed. As with all of our modules, we also teach advisors how to use the appropriate Questioning and Listening skills, and the LAURA model, to handle challenging conversations. For new advisors, their trainers monitor the use of these skills as they begin to take phone calls. As they progress through their training, and move into the wider call centres, the advisors and content of calls are monitored through the Quality Assurance Team. In either case, all feedback is passed to the relevant team leader where action plans can be made if they feel further coaching/support is required.
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	Why does the metering programme continue to raise complaints?	Whilst we strive to achieve zero complaints in regard to the Universal Metering programme, it is a mandatory initiative and an emotive subject. As some customers do not wish to have a meter installed, some complaints are unfortunately inevitable. However, the % of Written complaints to meters installed remains at an encouragingly low level, with the % of complaints per meter installed falling to 0.58% in H1 22/23, which is a dramatic fall from 2.06% recorded in 2018/19. Particularly reassuring as we have seen a significant increase in universal metering installations since the beginning of 2020. The main reason for complaints are customers objecting to having a meter installed, and their concerns that their bills could actually increase, and understanding on how the finished install will look. Therefore, to mitigate we have reviewed and revised the universal metering customer literature including information on our website with video explaining the end-to-end install process and what the customer should expect. An SMS is sent both before and after the installation to keep the customer informed, along with a bespoke survey request for us to gain a greater understanding of the customer's experience. For the new billing year (2023/24), a new easy to interpret cost comparison letter will also be sent, to help ease their concerns over any potential increase in water usage costs
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	Have you learnt, and do you continue to learn, from the experience of other companies who have undertaken similar compulsory metering programmes?	Yes, our delivery partner (Network Plus) have liaised with Seven Trent regarding their universal metering programme, however, they do have different demographics so comparison and learnings have been varied, with ongoing discussions in regard to improvements. With the adoption of Qualtrix, the market leading customer conversational and analytics platform, we have the opportunity to understand in greater detail how our customers feel about their experiences with Affinity Water. The platform also listens and analyses public posts on other water companies, so we can understand and learn about specific issues around universal metering programmes run by other water companies.
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	Do you have plans to pilot smart meters and can you model the demand saving opportunities?	Yes, we do have a plan to trial Smart metering programmes as part of our PR24 business plan. The pilot will enable real time meter reads to better identify changes in demand and the identification of leaks. We have also recently been requested by Defra to provide a view of any investments that can be accelerated from 2025 into earlier years to allow the industry to get a head start on key investment priorities before the PR24 process completes. As part of our proposals, we have included the procurement of smart meters to allow us as much time as possible to set up suppliers and contractors for the installation of smart meters. If successful, accelerating this investment will allow us to start smart metering much earlier in PR24
Responsive- Customers expect enquiries and complaints to be answered quickly and in full	21-Nov-22	Please can we include an agenda item on metering next year as members had many more questions on this topic than we had time to explore?	Yes, we propose to include this topic in the 'Environment and Resilience' sub group

<p>Research & Insight/Business Plans</p>	<p>23-Jan-23</p>	<p>How does the company plan to demonstrate that each piece of research, that will be used to support decisions described in the Business Plan, meets the quality standards expected by Ofwat? NB the final methodology states that any submitted evidence that does not meet that standard will be discounted.</p>	<p>Ofwat sets out the following principles (Ofwat, 2022, PR24 and beyond: Customer engagement policy – a position paper) that states high quality research should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Useful & Contextualised •Neutrally Designed •Fit for Purpose •Inclusive •Continual •Shared in Full with Others •Independently Assured •Ethical <p>The triangulation process discussed with the customer sub-committee works to meet the criteria that work included is Useful & Contextualised, and for non-Affinity sourced work, also Neutrally Designed, Inclusive & Fit for purpose, as the best handling of these issues are part of what turns research that is "fine" into research that is "really good".</p> <p>For Affinity commissioned pieces, not only does the triangulation scoring play a part, but is part of the commissioning process. The Customer Insight team advise on all research projects to ensure that briefs for research come back meeting those criteria. If you look at the briefs for the PR24 material, for example, you will see there is a specific clause demanding consideration of how to include vulnerable and other hard to reach audience. This clause is added as standard to any proposal CIE is aware of.</p> <p>Continual – we have several BAU systems that allow us to engage regularly; the Voice of the Customer program, the Water Community, and the Perceptions (Satisfaction) Tracker. The Water Community allows us to cover a wide variety of subjects in depth quickly. From April 2023 the perceptions tracker will have a "Hot swap" section that will allow us to survey a representative quant sample of customers on any key issues of the quarter (e.g. cost of living, awareness of SOS or other campaigns). The Voice of the Customer is an "always on" collation of feedback from customers who've reached out to us by contacting the contact centre, but also through new tools to scrape and analyse social media content. This is in addition to any bespoke pieces carried out by different departments. On top of this, we continually look to external industry trackers as well, e.g. CMEX, UKCSI for context.</p> <p>Shared in full with others: All research, internal and external, is loaded to our internal research library which is accessible via our intranet. Where we have them, reports include all relevant materials such as questionnaires or discussion guides (this might not be possible with externally commissioned pieces). This means that reports can be both directly circulated to key stakeholders for any given project, but also held for all to access when making their own plans in the future.</p> <p>Ethical – The CIE team are all members of the Market Research Society, and abide by the Professional Standards set out there. Additionally any 3rd party commissioned to carry out primary research on our behalf must be accredited members of the MRS.</p> <p>Independently Assured – As well as the work of the ICG, the PR24 research will also have a 3rd party assurance process</p>
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