

**South Staffordshire Water Customer Challenge Group – Customer Research Task
Group
Conference call, 4pm, 2nd September 2013**

MINUTES

Attendees:

Rachel Barber	South Staffs Water, Customer Services Director
Steve Morley	South Staffs Water, Compliance Director
Barbara Julye	South Staffs Water, Head of Customer Engagement
Matt Lewis	South Staffs Water, Regulation Director
Greg Marshall	Environment Agency/ SSW Customer Challenge Group
Richard Thompson	Environment Agency/ Cambridge Local Water Forum
David Wurr	Consumer Council for Water/ SSW Customer Challenge Group
John Thompson	SSW Charitable Trust/SSW Customer Challenge Group
Nigel Borrell	Countryside Properties/Cambridge Local Water Forum
Bernard Crump	Consumer Council for Water/ SSW Customer Challenge Group
Rachel Talbot	Citizens Advice Bureau/ Cambridge Local Water Forum
Jean Swanson	Cambridge City Council/Cambridge Local Water Forum
Amanda Borrman	ICS Consultancy
Lisa Gahan	ICS Consultancy
James Reid	

Apologies

Colin Greatorex	Lichfield District Council/ SSW Customer Challenge Group
Iain Page	Environment Agency/ Cambridge Local Water Forum

1. Welcome

Barbara Julye explained the purpose of today's call which was to go over the initial pilot results as promised in the last conference call. She apologised for having to cancel last Thursday's call but the results were delayed.

2. Review of minutes and actions from last meeting

A summary of changes to the pilot survey following from the previous week's conference call was given.

3. Matters arising

Amanda Borrman explained the methodology of the survey and gave a presentation on the pilot survey results, which members then discussed.

Suggestions for amendments to the main study were:

- Using the long term limiting illness question in the general household survey to give a comparison to the population as a whole
- To correct the number of socio economic group D and E participants to adequately reflect the make-up of the customer base
- It should be made clear what is meant about acceptability; customers to be asked about levels of bill rises, both with and without inflation being added
- To make questions shorter and more precise
- Ensure quotas of metered customers in the survey reflect the numbers of metered customers accurately

- To make it clear that the merger savings will become relevant to the Cambridge region if used to increase the Charitable Trust funds, since the Trust will be extended to the Cambridge region
- To word the social tariff question carefully in order not to alienate some customers
- The reference to EU legislation should not be used solely on questions about the environment – if relevant they should be used elsewhere, otherwise they should be removed altogether.

Suggestions for how the survey could be improved were:

- Make it a little shorter with a little less information
- Use plain English
- Allow more room for comments
- Include information on profits

The main points to come out of the pilot study included:

- Only 12% found it difficult to pay their bill/occasionally paid late
- Asked, uninformed, on whether they found the proposed increase acceptable, 64% found it acceptable/very acceptable, 34% unacceptable/completely unacceptable, 2% did not know
- Asked, informed, about the proposed rise, the figures changed to, 63% acceptable/very acceptable, 34% unacceptable/completely unacceptable, 3% did not know
- Acceptability or unacceptability seems to come down to a mixture of affordability and not wishing to pay more on bills
- Increases in sewerage costs also have an impact on levels of acceptability
- Taste of water and reliability of supply were the most important issues, with maintenance of systems and the environment also regarded as important
- 96% of people said they were very or fairly satisfied with the service
- Environmental improvements were found to be the least acceptable areas for investment due to the impact on bills.
- Customers preferred the idea of merger savings being used to reduce bills overall

The revised survey, show cards and presentation are to be sent out for further comment. Barbara thanked all for attending.