

14 December 2021

Variation of Leep Networks (Water) Limited's appointment to include a site called Heriot Street, Liverpool

About this document

Variation of Leep Network (Water) Limited's appointment to include Heriot Street, Liverpool

On 11 October 2021, Ofwat began a [consultation](#) on a proposal to vary Leep Network (Water) Limited's ("**Leep Water**") appointment to become the water and sewerage services provider for a development in United Utilities Water Limited's ("**United Utilities**") water supply area and sewerage services area called Heriot Street in Liverpool ("**the Site**").

The consultation ended on 8 November 2021. During the consultation period, we received representations from three organisations, which we considered in making our decision. On 7 December 2021, we granted Leep Water a variation to its existing appointment to enable it to supply water and sewerage services to the Site.

This notice gives our reasons for making this variation.

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1. Introduction

The new appointment and variation mechanism, specified by Parliament and set out in primary legislation, allows one company to replace the current company as the provider of water and sewerage services for a specific area. This mechanism can be used by new companies to enter the market and by existing companies to expand into areas where they are not the appointed company. In this case, Leep Water applied to replace United Utilities to become the appointed water and sewerage company for the Site.

A company may apply for a new appointment (or a variation of its existing appointment to serve an additional site) if any of the following three criteria are met:

- None of the premises in the proposed area of appointment is served by the existing appointed company at the time the appointment is made (the “**unserved criterion**”);
- Each premises is likely to be supplied with at least 50 mega litres per year (in England) or at least 250 mega litres per year (in Wales) and the customer in relation to each premises consents (“**the large user criterion**”);
- The existing water and sewerage supplier in the area consents to the appointment (“**the consent criterion**”).

When considering applications for new appointments and variations, Ofwat operates within the statutory framework set out by Parliament, including our duty to protect consumers, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition. In particular, in relation to unserved sites, we seek to ensure that the future customers on the site – who do not have a choice of supplier – are adequately protected. When assessing applications for new appointments and variations, the two key policy principles we apply are:

1. Customers, or future customers, should be no worse off than if they had been supplied by the existing appointee; and
2. We must be satisfied that an applicant will be able to finance the proper carrying out of its functions as a water and/or sewerage company.

Entry and expansion (and even the threat of such by potential competitors) can lead to benefits for different customers (such as household and business customers and developers of new housing sites). Benefits can include price discounts, better services, environmental improvements and innovation in the way services are delivered.

Benefits can also accrue to customers who remain with the existing appointee, because when the existing appointee faces a challenge to its business, that challenge can act as a spur for it to improve its services. We believe the wider benefits of competition through the

new appointments and variations mechanism can offset any potential disbenefits for existing customers that might arise. We consider these potential disbenefits in more detail below.

2. The application

Leep Water applied to be the water and sewerage services appointee for the Site under the unserved criterion set out in section 7(4)(b) of the Water Industry Act 1991 (“**WIA91**”). Leep Water will serve the Site by way of a bulk supply agreement and bulk discharge agreement with United Utilities.

2.1 Unserved status of the Site

To qualify under the unserved criterion, an applicant must show that at the time the appointment is made, none of the premises in the proposed area of appointment is served by the existing appointee.

United Utilities has provided a letter, dated 25 July 2021, confirming that, in its view, the Site is unserved as there are no existing connections to the Site. United Utilities also noted that it has existing operational assets running through the Site and that Leep Water should take care when excavating the Site.

The Site is a brownfield site, and a desk survey shows no properties within the Site's boundary. We are satisfied that given this and the letter provided by United Utilities the Site is unserved.

2.2 Financial viability of the proposal

We will only make an appointment if we are satisfied that the proposal poses a low risk of being financially non-viable. We assess the risk of financial viability on a site-by-site basis and also consider the financial position of the company as a whole.

Based on the information available to us, we concluded the Site demonstrates sufficient financial viability, and Leep Water has satisfied us that it can finance its functions and that it is able to properly carry them out.

2.3 Assessment of ‘no worse off’

Leep Networks will match its charges to customers on the Site to those of United Utilities.

With regard to service levels, we have reviewed Leep Water's Codes of Practice and its proposed service levels and compared these to the Codes of Practice and the performance

commitments of United Utilities. Based on this review, we are satisfied that customers will be offered an appropriate level of service by Leep Water and that overall customers will be 'no worse off' being served by Leep Water instead of by United Utilities.

2.4 Effect of appointment on United Utilities's customers

In considering whether customers will be no worse off, we also looked at the potential effects of this variation on the price that United Utilities' existing customer base may face.

The calculation necessarily depends on a range of assumptions, and there are clearly difficulties involved in quantifying the effect on customers of United Utilities. It is therefore necessary to use a simplified set of figures. We have expressed the effect in 'per bill' terms to try and quantify the possible effect in an easily understandable way. Broadly, we have assessed the potential magnitude of this impact by comparing how much United Utilities might have expected to receive in revenue from serving the Site directly, were it to serve the Site, with the revenues it might expect from the proposed arrangement with Leep Water.

In this case, we have calculated that if we grant the site to Leep Water there will be no potential impact on the annual bills of United Utilities' existing water and sewerage customers.

This impact does not take into account the potential spillover benefits to customers arising from dynamic efficiencies achieved as a result of the competitive process to win new sites.

2.5 Developer choice

Where relevant, we take into consideration the choices of the site developer. In this case, the developer, Legacie Contracts Limited, said that it wanted Leep Water to be the water and sewerage company for the Site.

3. Responses received to the consultation

We received three responses to our consultation; from the Consumer Council for Water ("**CCW**"), Environment Agency and Drinking Water Inspectorate ("**DWI**"). We considered these responses before making the decision to vary Leep Networks' appointment.

The DWI and Environment Agency had no comments to make with regard to this consultation and did not have any objections. The points raised in CCW's response are set out below.

3.1 CCW

CCW states that in general it expects applicants for a new appointment and/or variation ("**NAV**") to match or, ideally, better the incumbent's prices, service levels and service guarantees. This is particularly true for developments that include domestic housing, as household customers cannot choose or switch supplier.

CCW is disappointed that there is no direct financial benefit to customers from having Leep Water as their provider of water and sewerage services, as Leep Water intends to match United Utilities' charges.

CCW considers that Leep Water's service levels generally match or exceed those of United Utilities, so overall CCW supports the application. For example, where Leep Water exceeds United Utilities' standards it does so by offering greater levels of compensation if it fails to meet the level of service it commits to.

CCW notes that due to the relatively small size of its customer base, Leep Water will not be able to offer a social tariff to financially vulnerable customers in the way United Utilities does, although it will offer the standard WaterSure tariff for qualifying customers. CCW considers this a dis-benefit of the proposed variation. CCW states that until it can provide a formal social tariff, it is appropriate for Leep Water to tailor some of the services that it provides. CCW sets out its expectation that Leep Water would offer appropriate, flexible support to any customer in financial difficulty who would otherwise have benefitted from a social tariff and that this should not be at the expense of its other customers. CCW states that it recognises that by matching United Utilities' charges Leep Water already benefits from the cross-subsidy United Utilities' customers pay to support its social tariffs.

CCW notes our conclusion that, as a result of the variation, United Utilities' existing customers should not see any increase in their annual water and sewerage bills. It notes that it is unclear whether there will be any significant benefits from the arrangement for the existing customers of United Utilities. CCW questions the value of the NAV regime if it cannot deliver benefits to all customers.

Our response

One of our key policies when considering NAV applications, is that customers should be no worse off if a NAV is granted. That is, an applicant must ensure its new customers are made no worse off in terms of charges and service than if they had been supplied by the previous appointee. We do not require applicants to better the service and price of previous incumbents.

Vulnerable customers may not be aware of the social tariff that would be available to them if they were served by the incumbent rather than by the applicant. It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify and protect vulnerable customers on the Site. Although the applicant does not offer a social tariff, it should ensure customers will be no worse off.

4. Conclusion

Having assessed Leep Water's application, and having taken account of the responses we received to our consultation, we decided to grant a variation to Leep Water's area of appointment to allow it to serve the Site for water and sewerage services. This appointment became effective on 8 December 2021.

Appendix 1: Site Maps

Water:



PLANS REFERRED TO IN THE VARIATIONS OF THE APPOINTMENTS OF LEEP NETWORKS (WATER) LTD AND UNITED UTILITIES WATER LIMITED, AS WATER UNDERTAKERS, MADE BY THE WATER SERVICES REGULATION AUTHORITY ON:.....

Heriot Street
Liverpool
L5 7SB
SJ 34696 92830

7 December 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. G. G. G.', positioned to the right of the date.

Sewerage:



PLANS REFERRED TO IN THE VARIATIONS OF THE APPOINTMENTS OF LEEP NETWORKS (WATER) LTD AND UNITED UTILITIES WATER LIMITED, AS SEWERAGE UNDERTAKERS, MADE BY THE WATER SERVICES REGULATION AUTHORITY ON:.....

7 December 2021

Heriot Street
Liverpool
L5 7SB
SJ 34696 92830

**Ofwat (The Water Services Regulation Authority)
is a non-ministerial government department.
We regulate the water sector in England and Wales.**

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