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Yorkshire Water
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By email: customerfocus@ofwat.gov.uk

29 January 2024

Dear Ofwat,

RE: Core Customer Information – Ofwat's draft guidance on core information companies should clearly provide to their customers

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the consultation published on 21 November 2023 that sets out Ofwat's proposals for draft guidance for all water companies in communicating to customers key information which they need to know and understand.

Following the decision Ofwat made to introduce a new customer focused licence condition into Condition G of companies' licences, it intends to move the content of the current Condition G, that sets out Core Customer Information companies must provide to their customers, into guidance. As such, this new guidance is of importance to companies and their customers alike and we note companies should take this guidance into account in relation to their compliance with the new customer focused licence.

We have reviewed the draft guidance proposed within the consultation document and provide our observations and feedback against the questions raised below appended to this letter.

We look forward to Ofwat's next iteration of the guidance on Core Customer Information and in advance of this, we would be happy to discuss our thoughts further with Ofwat, including about how this and other guidance associated with the customer focused licence condition should be governed and future changes managed.

Should you have any questions about our consultation response, please let me know.

Yours faithfully,

Yorkshire Water

Yorkshire Water response: Core Customer Information – Ofwat's draft guidance on core information companies should clearly provide to their customers.

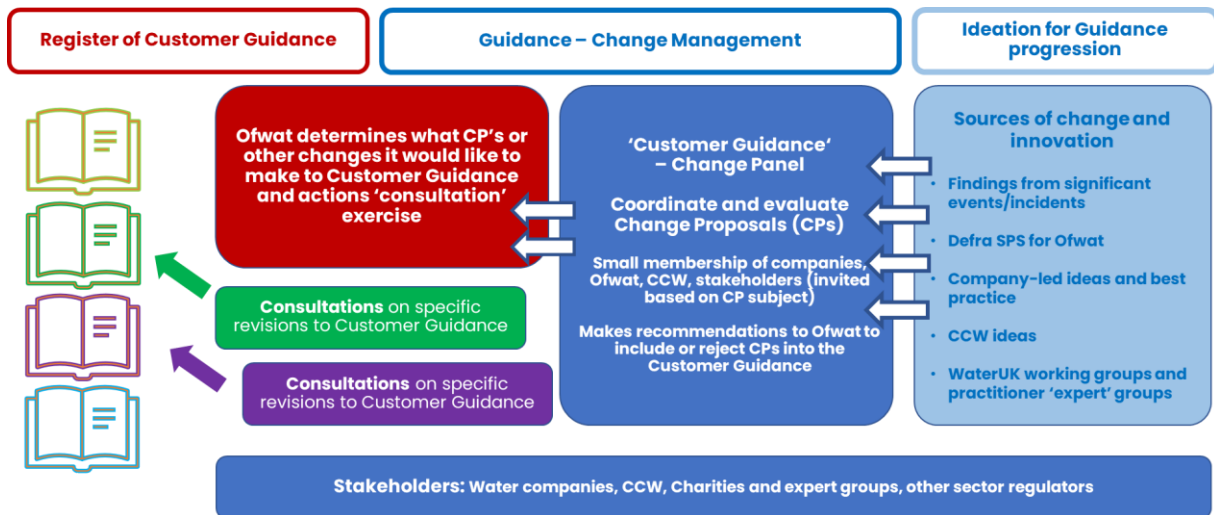
General Observations:

Yorkshire Water would welcome inclusion by Ofwat in the guidance a description for how it will operate a 'guidance change management and governance protocol', covering how and when the guidance can be modified and how the impact upon companies' provision of Core Customer Information from a future change in guidance may be sized and taken into account. This change management and governance protocol should also set out Ofwat's expectations with regard to the approach and timelines that it deems appropriate for companies to update their Core Customer Information policies and processes to maintain compliance with the guidance as it evolves over time. We believe this would also be helpful to all users of the guidance, including stakeholders representing customers or communities.

In our responses to the series of consultations on the new customer focused licence condition, we referred to the value of formal change management framework that could be set up to cover all the guidance's that underpin the licence condition requirements. We would like to see the guidance describe in detail how Ofwat will seek and take into consideration the views of stakeholders for future iterations of this Core Customer Information guidance.

The guidance will be a key component of a regulatory framework that is intended to be effective for customers for many years to come. We would like proactive stakeholder consultation to be a feature of how the guidance is managed into the future. The diagram below outlines what we believe could be the features at a high level of a formal change proposal and consultative governance approach supported by an expert technical panel could look like.

Such an approach could be used across all guidance's that underpin and bring to life the new customer focused licence condition.



Question 1: Should this guidance set an expectation for a single Code of Practice (or other form), or should companies determine how and where to display this information? OR: Do you agree with our proposal not to prescribe how, where and when to communicate the Core Customer Information?

The consultation document refers to two different text under Question 1., but we believe our response will address both options.

We would like to see companies be given the flexibility to determine how, where and when Core Customer Information is best displayed and made accessible for all their customers, and we feel there is no requirement for Ofwat to develop and mandate the method and details through a national Code of Practice.

Question 2: Do you agree with our proposed changes as summarised in Table 1?

We agree with most of the proposed changes set out in Table 1 of the consultation that make updates to the Core Customer Information provisions as currently set out in Condition G (which will be redundant once the new customer focused licence condition comes into effect in February 2024).

However, we have a concern with how the second and third proposed changes are phrased.

Companies must set out how customers can identify the company's genuine staff members. This is to be extended to include how a customer can identify

staff who are communicating online, e.g. on social media. This is particularly important during incidents.

As more customers engage with us through digital channels and the use of social media platforms both for general enquiries and specific interactions about the services they receive, we support the principle that customers must be confident they are dealing with the correct company and people authorised to engage with them on matters. Presently, we use the mechanisms provided by the online social media platform providers as best we can to help give customers comfort they are indeed addressing Yorkshire Water, and the responses or announcements our staff make in relation to campaigns or incidents are coming from Yorkshire Water.


We would welcome further clarity from Ofwat on its expectations around identifying water company staff (or those of appointed agents acting on a company's behalf) communicating online with customers.

Details about the company's complaints handling procedure, to be extended to include the role of CCW and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

Under CCW's new One Stop Shop complaints resolution processes that came into operation on 1 December 2023, CCW specifically asked companies to remove any reference to the term ADR (and by inference WATRS) from their published complaints procedures and documentation whether on websites or in physical materials, etc. CCW instead wants companies to refer to customers to CCW only in communications with customers (and that this reference represents a single third step in the end-to-end complaints management process). In CCW's own communications to customers referred to it, it may promote a complaints escalation pathway as ADR.

Yorkshire Water has, as instructed, removed references to ADR/WATRS from our complaints management communications with customers. We only reference ADR in our legal privacy notice in relation to data sharing stating that we have a legal obligation to do so if the customer has taken their complaint to ADR.

Extract from CCW communication to companies relating to ADR/WATRS.



Customer messaging by companies

- Audit of companies website comparing current ADR messaging
- CCW's ask of companies to:
 - remove ADR/WATRS narrative from customer facing channels
 - ensure all exhausted complaints are signposted to CCW as stage 3
- We will provide a company briefing pack, which will include:
 - copies of our training material used for our Advisors
 - an overview of mediation and frequent asked questions for your front line teams
 - collated questions from across the industry
 - Wording for use on your website and literature
- We can attend training sessions with your team

Question 3: Do you agree with the proposed scope for the Core Customer Information? In your view, is anything missing or should be excluded?

We agree with the scope as proposed. We have no additions to recommend at this time.

Question 4: Do you agree with the proposed approach for companies reviewing their Core Customer Information?

Yes, we agree that companies should continue to review and revise (where necessary) their Core Customer Information regularly, and at least once every three years or whenever requested to do so by Ofwat (perhaps after a change in its Core Customer Information guidance).

Ofwat then goes further to require that *“When a change has been made to the Core Customer Information, companies should ensure customers are notified directly of the changes in a form appropriate to the varying individual needs.”*

Although we agree that any changes to Core Customer Information should be updated promptly in all communications channels the company may use to share this information with customers, we do not agree universally that customers should be ‘notified’ of the changes as this is often impractical and not what customers may desire.

We do not believe customers who had received previous Core Customer Information should be contacted to advise them that the content of this information has been updated. As is good practice, we will continue to confirm updates to Core Customer Information with appropriate reference to dates and version controls of documents and will help staff working with customers give the most up to date information as necessary.

We would welcome Ofwat outlining its expectations in this area.

Question 5: Do you agree on the proposed areas on which companies should consult CCW? Are there any other areas on which CCW should be consulted in relation to Core Customer Information and the customer focused licence condition?

We agree with the proposed areas on which companies should consult CCW where changes are significant or refer to the role of CCW. We do not believe there are other areas in relation to Core Customer Information that CCW should be consulted on.
