

CCG phone call

27 January 2017

CCG attendees:- Lakh Jemmett, Charles Burns, Karen Gibbs, John Hall, David Howarth, Simon Oakley, Ingrid Strawson, Caroline Brook

PRT attendees:- Neville Smith, Helen Orton, Paul Barfoot, Ian Limb, Mark Mills, Steve Morley

Apologises:- Douglas Kite, Jon Stewart, Piers Bateman

Background

The primary purpose of the call was for Rob Sheldon of Accent to present his customer research findings to the CCG.

The research was undertaken in November 2016 and several members of the CCG attended some of the Focus Groups. There were six focus groups, two each in Chichester, Gosport and Portsmouth with a mix of social demographic groups and two which were specifically non-household.

The presentation was circulated to all members in advance.

Presentation

Rob Sheldon worked through his presentation, responding to questions from CCG members as appropriate.

He highlighted the following:-

This was the first piece of research in this planning round as per the Company Customer Engagement Strategy.

It is qualitative research – no numbers – and the key question it was seeking to answer was whether the priorities and plans the Company had established for PR14, which were gleaned in 2013, remain appropriate today.

Each member of the focus groups undertook an exercise over the preceding week to identify how they used water and how they would feel if water was not available. This allowed members to start to determine the “value” of water in its widest sense.

Spontaneous response relating to priorities from the groups identified hardness and taste and odour as key issues for many. John Hall, Ingrid Strawson and Karen Gibbs questioned this issue further. The Company concluded by stating this was an issue it would need to explore further in its research programme.

In summary, at this stage of the focus group, customers agreed with objectives the Company was trying to address but stated they could not easily determine how strong the commitment was without some comparison.

Discussion then focused on the 4 categories of activity presented:-

- Taking water from the environment
- Transporting water to customer taps
- Dealing with customer queries, billing and water efficiency
- Other Company activities

The following comments and issues were raised by the groups:-

- There was a lack of clarity as to what was meant by protecting the environment
- How does the Company work with farmers (to reduce pollution in the water)?
- Is the renewable target challenging enough?
- Leakage seems very high
- Is top 4 performance for customer service that good?
- Keen to ensure company develop its workforce.

The Company responded to this section of the presentation noting firstly that the session was in total 90 minutes and to provide more detail would have been a challenge. It was for this reason in particular that the Company was establishing a Customer Advisory Panel who would, over a series of longer meetings, become more informed. Further, the feedback would be valuable in preparing its next steps.

Turning to the three specific topics, there was much discussion around the issue of metering. There was clearly a “social split” around metering though quite often there is a disconnect between individual water usage and the impact on the environment.

There was a distrust around the financial impacts of metering and a challenge that the Company should address leakage before imposing metering on customers.

On restrictions of use there was a general view that customers would not be willing to pay more to reduce the likelihood of a hosepipe ban.

On non-household competition there was surprise that this was starting in April 2017, though some non-household customers did recall the letter from PRT introducing Castle Water.

In summary the following key issues were highlighted:-

- Water quality – be that hardness or taste and odour
- More ambition on leakage, renewables and customer service
- Little appetite for compulsory metering

Members of the CCG then had an opportunity to make some observations. Simon Oakley commented that whilst the issues of hardness and leakage were quite loud, there was no quantification of how much customers may be willing to pay to address the issues. This would be addressed in subsequent research.

Karen Gibbs noted that the issue of hardness in particular was not new, and asked if the Company felt it had done enough on this issue in terms of communication. The Company acknowledged this was something it would always need to focus on.

Helen Orton concluded by thanking Rob Sheldon for his presentation and stated that it would now prepare its next customer research exercise – which it would share with the CCG when developed.

Customer Advisory Panel (CAP)

Ian Limb informed the CCG of progress to date in establishing the CAP. Community Research would manage this process and therefore it would be independent of the Company.

CR are currently recruiting members to reflect the customer base, urban / rural, metered / unmetered, by socio economic grouping and also to include those on the Social Tariff. John Hall commented on the importance of hearing the rural voice.

There would be three sessions, all about 3 hours in duration, held at Staunton Country Park. These would be end February, end April and end June. The first session would effectively repeat the Accent workshop and confirm or otherwise the findings.

Ian stated that the principle was that by the end of the third session he hoped that the views of the group were more informed about the Company and issues relating to water supply

The CCG would be given a full update at its meeting in May.

Performance update

Neville Smith took the opportunity to update the CCG on the following issues:-

- Mean Zonal Compliance in 2016
- Leakage in 2017/18
- Water resources in 2017
- Household bills 2017/18.

Close

There being no other issues, the meeting was closed.

The next CCG will be on 9 May 2017, in Havant.

SM

2 February 2017