

1. PURPOSE OF PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to share a high level overview of the findings of the Outcomes Language Review and the proposed recommendations in-line with the research.

2. PAPER CONTENT

Desktop and field research were carried out between January and May 2017.

We asked employees, customers and stakeholders whether they understood our Outcome statements; did they make sense to them, were there any words or phrases they did not understand and about what they thought was meant by each statement, including a breakdown of the words and phrases used.

We held in-depth discussion groups with small groups of employees, used Flo, our customer engagement vehicle, to talk to customers on their turf, we emailed surveys to key stakeholders, and we held five customer focus groups with Explain market research across our operating areas.

In the surveys and focus groups, customers were told that on this occasion we were not looking to see if they agreed with each statement, just whether the wording was clear or if we could describe our commitments to them in a better way.

We did not include 'We are the retailer of choice' Outcome because this research took place after retail separation. We also decided not to review our People Outcomes because our 'Defining the Conversation' research told us that customers trusted us to get on with our People Outcomes and this was not an area they wanted to talk to us about.

3. WHO WE HAVE SPOKEN TO ACROSS BOTH NW & ESW REGIONS

- 218 household customers 'on their turf' at events in the heart of their communities using Flo and our team of Customer Heroes.
- In-depth discussions with 49 household customers at five dedicated Outcomes focus group events with our market research partner, Explain.
- 468 employees through an online poll and 13 employees in dedicated Outcomes discussion groups.
- Eight key stakeholders including councillors and organisations such as the RSPB.

For full rationale behind each of the recommendations below, please refer to a separate paper: 'Outcomes – recommendations for moving forward', which is attached as an Appendix to this paper.

There is also a full 115 page report on the findings of the customer focus groups that is separate to this document. This can be found in Sharepoint.

4. OUR CUSTOMERS TOLD US

- They did not like a statement that sounded boastful.
- Evidence or proof was requested for some of the statements.
- They did not like us to speak on behalf of our customers without evidencing that we had spoken to our customers first.

Current Outcome	Proposed change
We deliver water and sewerage services that meet the needs of current and future generations in a changing world.	We provide clean drinking water and effective sewerage services; now, and for future generations.
We supply clean, clear drinking water that tastes good.	Our drinking water is clean, clear and tastes good.

We provide a reliable and sufficient supply of water.	We always provide a reliable supply of water.
We provide excellent service and impress our customers.	Our customers tell us we provide excellent customer service and resolve issues quickly.
Our customers consider the services they receive to be value for money.	Our customers say our services are good value for money.
Our customers are well informed about the services they receive and the value of water.	Our customers say they feel informed about the services we provide and the importance of water.
We provide a sewerage service that deals effectively with sewage and heavy rainfall.	Our sewerage service deals with sewage and heavy rainfall effectively.
We help to improve the quality of rivers and coastal waters for the benefit of people, the environment and wildlife.	We help to improve the quality of rivers and coastal waters for the benefit of people, the environment and wildlife. (no change)
We protect and enhance the environment in delivering our services, leading by example.	We take care to protect and improve the environment in everything we do, leading by example.
We are an efficient and innovative company.	We are an efficient and innovative company. (no change)
Our finances are sound, stable and achieve a fair balance between customers and investors.	Our finances are sound, stable and achieve a fair balance between customers and investors. (no change)
We are proud to contribute to the success of local communities.	We are proud to support our communities by giving time and resources to their important causes.
We work in partnership towards common goals.	We work in partnership with companies and organisations to achieve the goals that are most important to our customers.
We are a company that customers trust.	Our customers say we are a company they trust.

<p>CURRENT OUTCOME: We deliver water and sewerage services that meet the needs of current and future generations in a changing world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairly well understood and low priority for change of language however, room for improvement/to simplify. 'In a changing world' should be replaced as it is seen as 'cheesy' and vague. Consider ways to improve 'Meet the needs of current and future generations'. 'Water and sewerage services' should be described in a more simple way. <p>RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE: We provide safe, clean drinking water and effective sewerage services; now, and for future generations.</p>

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We supply clean, clear drinking water that tastes good.

- Retain 'clean and clear' and 'drinking water'.
- Could consider adding in 'fresh' or 'safe', but not absolutely necessary.
- Generally well understood.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Our drinking water is clean, clear and tastes good.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We provide a reliable and sufficient supply of water.

- The majority knew this was about the supply of the water, rather than the quality.
- This was a low priority, with the majority not wanting to change the wording at all but there was confusion around the word 'sufficient' and one area said to remove it.
- The only word that divided opinion was 'sufficient'.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

We always provide a reliable supply of water.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We provide excellent service and impress our customers.

- Customers wanted this to be re-worded as a high priority.
- Remove 'impress our customers'.
- Find better way to describe what is meant by excellent service without being boastful.
- Say it is the Company's aim or evidence that it's true if we have proof.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Our customers tell us we provide excellent customer service and resolve issues quickly.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

Our customers consider the services they receive to be value for money

- Don't speak on behalf of the customers – give evidence that we know this to be true.
- Most think it's clear what is meant by 'the services'.
- Add 'good' to 'value for money'.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Our customers say our services are good value for money.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

Our customers are well informed about the services they receive and the value of water.

- The value of water has two meanings.
- High priority for re-write.
- The customer decides if they are well informed, rather than us telling them they are.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Our customers say they feel informed about the services we provide and the importance of water.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We provide a sewerage service that deals effectively with sewage and heavy rainfall (NW only).

- No one wanted to change this statement.
- The wording conveys how seriously this job is taken.
- The tone is right in terms of not sounding boastful but still being impressive.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Our sewerage service deals with sewage and heavy rainfall effectively.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We help to improve the quality of rivers and coastal waters for the benefit of people, the environment and wildlife.

- Well understood/low priority for change.
- Gives a positive perception of the Company.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

None.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We protect and enhance the environment in delivering our services, leading by example.

- This statement was a medium priority for change but what the alterations should be were split.
- Some want more clarity on how the Company protects the environment.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

We take care to protect and improve the environment in everything we do, leading by example.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We are an efficient and innovative company.

- Overall the majority were happy with the wording and considered this was a low priority for change.
- Evidence to prove the statement would be beneficial.
- Clarity needed around the meaning of 'efficient' – whether this means lack of waste or at a low cost.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

None.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

Our finances are sound, stable and achieve a fair balance between customers and investors.

- Well understood – low priority for change.
- Conveys the right message.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

None.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We are proud to contribute to the success of local communities.

- There is confusion around what we are giving – time or money.
- It isn't clear what the success is that the Outcome refers to.
- The majority of customers wanted to change the wording of this statement to improve the clarity.
- Customers felt this was one area where the Company could shout more about the good work its employees are doing across their operating areas.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

We are proud to support our communities by giving time and resources to their important causes.

CURRENT OUTCOME:

We work in partnership towards common goals.

- The words are clear but people don't know what the goals are or who we are working in partnership with.
- This was the most confusing Outcome to customers.
- Needs a lot more detail to ensure clarity.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

We work in partnership with companies and organisations to achieve the goals that are most important to our customers.

CURRENT OUTCOME: We are a company that customers trust.

- Customers liked the wording and 'trust' conjures up positive perceptions.
- The changes suggested were to add personal pronouns to soften the statement - eg 'our' customers or 'you' trust.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Our customers say we are a company they trust.

5. WATER FORUMS ACTION

The full report is to be circulated. Please focus on the proposed new Outcome statements and at the Water Forums meeting on 1 November, members are asked to provide either challenge or endorsement for each one.

ELAINE ERSKINE
Strategic Research and Assurance Manager

12 October 2017



OUTCOMES

Language review

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OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

OUTCOMES

Outcomes were introduced by Ofwat at PR14 and, as part of the research we carried out when creating our Business Plan for 2015-2010, we talked with customers and stakeholders who told us what they want from us. We turned these statements into Outcomes. Our Water Forums helped to challenge and refine the content and wording and the final Outcome statements were tested with customers. 88% agreed the statements covered everything they expected, and we began using them in 2013. Ofwat said that our Outcomes 'meet Ofwat expectations'.

DEFINING THE CONVERSATION

When using the Outcome statements in our 'Defining the conversation research' in 2016, it became clear that customers needed us to describe the measures of service to help them to understand some of the statements. We knew that our customers wanted Outcomes to avoid jargon so we hadn't used any technical terms, but some of our customers told us they took away different meanings from the words.

As a result of this we decided to carry out research to look at how we could improve our Outcome statements to make sure that we are using the right language and talking to our customers in the way they want us to.

We also surveyed our employees to see what they thought. There were 172 responses to the question: *Do you think the language used on our Outcomes statements is clear and easy to understand?*

62.79% Said No
37.21% Said Yes

We also asked 296 employees if they knew what our Outcome statements were and 69% didn't.



OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

RESEARCH – METHODOLOGY

OUR BRAND TONE OF VOICE

Our tone of voice is informed by Our Vision and Values, Our Way and Our Purpose and has been further developed and embedded since PR14. We keep the audience at the heart of communications, highlight benefits, get to the point quickly and use relevant examples. The language we use should show pride, knowledge and confidence, be honest, use Plain English and demonstrate a positive first response.

We know that customers are highly influenced by a brand's language. We know they like words such as 'consistent' and 'innovative'. We also know people respond better companies we use 'real' words, for example, The Times had a section on their website called 'News Agenda', which more than doubled its page views when they changed 'News Agenda' to 'Don't miss the moments that matter.'

Consumers want to feel wanted

Research also reveals that nearly one-in-three believe it is important for brands to show they care so that consumers feel more connected to the product or service – a quarter say it helps them justify a purchase.

DESKTOP RESEARCH

First we looked at how our Outcomes had been developed initially. We studied Ofwat's response to our original Outcome statements and what other water companies had created. We took learning from PR14, looked at what Ofwat wants going forward, and finally we looked at best practice for presenting Outcomes in other industries (see Appendix A on page 24).

FIELD RESEARCH

Employees

We held small discussion groups with our people to ask them if they understood the Outcome statements - did they make sense to them, were there any words or phrases they didn't understand and what did they think was meant by each statement?

Flo

Using our customer engagement vehicle, we surveyed customers across our operating regions to ask them what each specific Outcome meant to them. With there being 13 Outcomes in Essex & Suffolk and 14 in the north east, we broke the surveys down to ask each customer about two Outcomes only. We rotated the surveys so that each Outcome was covered.

We didn't include 'We are the retailer of choice' Outcome because this research took place after retail separation. We also decided not to review our people Outcomes because our 'Defining the

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

Conversation' research told us that customers trusted us to get on with our people Outcomes and this wasn't an area they wanted to talk to us about.

In the surveys customers were told that on this occasion we weren't looking to see if they agreed with each statement, just whether the wording was clear or if we could describe our commitments to them in a better way.

Then each statement was broken down, for example:

Outcome: We protect and enhance the environment in delivering our services, leading by example. What do you think this means? Are there any words or phrases that you wouldn't use or don't understand? What do you think we mean by: Protect and enhance, Delivering our services, and Leading by example?

Customer focus groups

Working with Explain Market Research, we held five customer focus groups across our operating regions to ask customers in detail what they thought of the Outcomes statements. At each of these, every customer was asked about every Outcome statement and also asked to give suggestions of how they could be improved. There is a full 115 page report on the findings of the focus groups that is separate to this document.

Stakeholders

Key stakeholders were emailed surveys on the Outcome statements that related to them, again the statements were broken down to ascertain the meanings they took from the language used.



OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS REPORT

- Draft a revised set of Outcomes in a customer friendly language by August 2017.

APPROACH

Phase one was to find out what our audiences think of the language of our current Outcomes. We have used this feedback to write a revised set of draft Outcome statements.

We will seek challenge and endorsement for the proposed Outcomes from our Water Forums and ELT (executive leadership team) then we recommend a phase two where we test the new set of draft Outcomes to find out what our audiences think of the new language used. We would then use this feedback to finalise our Outcome statements before incorporating them into our 2020-25 business plan at PR19.

Once we have the finalised statements we recommend an awareness campaign to embed the new statements with our customers and to promote a level of understanding.

WHO WE'VE SPOKEN TO ACROSS BOTH NW & ESW REGIONS

- 218 household customers 'on their turf' at events in the heart of their communities using Flo and her team of Customer Heroes.
- In depth discussions with 49 household customers at five dedicated Outcomes focus group events with our market research partner, Explain.
- 468 employees through an online poll and 13 employees in dedicated Outcomes discussion groups.
- Eight key stakeholders including councilors and organisations such as RSPB.

KEY FINDINGS

The report covers the key findings for each statement and recommendations to improve the language. It reviews each Outcome in detail but there were also some key findings that applied to the statements in general:

- Customers didn't like a statement that sounded boastful.
- Customers wanted to see evidence or proof of some of the statements.
- They didn't like us to speak on behalf of our customers without evidencing that we had spoken to our customers first.

A personal observation from attending the focus groups was that some customers thought there are too many Outcome statements. A recommendation for PR19 is to remove the statements that are less of a priority to customers and to condense / merge statements that have a similar meaning to reduce the set of Outcomes statements.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

OUR CUSTOMERS TOLD US

We asked what the statements meant to them.

CURRENT OUTCOME: We deliver water and sewerage services that meet the needs of current and future generations in a changing world.

Our people said:

Our employees know this refers to projects such as the expansion of Abberton Reservoir to meet growing population needs. They think that our customers wouldn't know about our business planning process and this Outcome is talking about future plans so customers wouldn't necessarily be aware of this. They think that 'meet the needs' is a bland statement and we should shout a bit more about how we participate in a changing world by our work with WaterAid. They also thought that 'in a changing world' was cheesy and that we should try to sell ourselves more.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

They felt this Outcome meant NW/ESW was staying one step ahead of the game. The phrase 'in a changing' world was seen as vague by ESW respondents but some NW respondents felt it referred to a growing population requiring more water. 'Meet the needs of current and future generations' was seen as confusing, with the majority questioning how future needs could be met which do not yet exist.

This was a low priority statement in terms of making alterations to the wording. The majority were content with the original wording but two locations want to add in the word 'clean' before water services to describe what the services actually are in a better way. Despite initial confusion over the phrase 'in a changing world' the majority said they understood it eventually and chose to retain the phrase but thought it could be improved.

"Improving things so our kids and grandkids will have the same services we have now. It's about the growing population and the world needing more water. We're going to have to learn how to handle water better, not use so much of it."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

They thought the statement makes sense and described it as progressive, future proofing and sustainable. Some customers said they don't understand what we mean by 'sewerage services'. Being environmentally friendly and caring about conservation come to mind.

Our stakeholders said:

This statement tells customers you plan for future growth and make appropriate technological improvements. Stakeholders think it's about current population and potential future growth in demand - families are getting smaller but water use is increasing with more bathrooms per head. The stakeholders also thought this told customers that the company is aware of societal changes, remain aware of trends and predict potential change. They felt that 'in a changing world' wasn't required and the Outcomes should instead talk about planning for future customers.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

KEY FINDINGS:

- Fairly well understood and low priority for change of language however, room for improvement and to simplify.
- 'In a changing world' should be replaced as it is seen as cheesy and vague.
- Consider ways to improve 'Meet the needs of current and future generations'.
- 'Water and sewerage services' should be described in a more simple way.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback, the statement could be improved to:

We provide safe, clean drinking water and effective sewerage services; now, and for future generations.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We supply clean, clear drinking water that tastes good.

Our people said:

Employees like this statement and think it does exactly what it says on the tin - it's to the point, clear and something to aspire to.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

This was a medium priority in terms of changing the language but all of the suggested changes were conflicted. Most felt it emphasised the safety of the water. The phrase 'clean and clear' reinforced the feeling that the water is safe as well as making respondents think that the water had been treated properly. The phrase 'drinking water' further reinforced the feeling that the water was safe but some people noted the word 'safe' or 'fresh' could be added. The phrase 'tastes good' meant that the experience of drinking water should be a positive one but this phrase split customer opinion with some wanting to retain it and others wanting to remove it.

"Drinking water" makes it sound safe for consumption and better quality than just water. You don't get ill; it's hygienic, properly treated, no particles or dirt. Pure. You think it will meet certain standards and you drink it straight away, without having to boil it first."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

They thought this statement was easy to understand. It made them think their tap water is safe, healthy, hygienic and trustworthy. Some people had issues with the 'taste' element and didn't think it should be included.

Our stakeholders said:

They were happy with 'clean and clear' as descriptors. Stakeholders thought the Outcome means the water is safe to use and palatable with no unpleasant taste of minerals or chlorine. They said it showed that water is good for us, won't infect us and negates the need to buy bottled.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Retain 'clean and clear' and 'drinking water'.
- Consider adding in 'fresh' or 'safe'.
- Generally well understood.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

While this was a medium priority for change, opinion at the focus groups was divided so following wider customer feedback on Flo that the Outcome was generally well understood, with most people understanding the water is safe to drink, there is no need to make big changes to the statement. Adding 'fresh' or 'safe' would only make the statement longer and add too many descriptors. Also customers said the existing words made them think the water was safe already, without it having to be explicitly mentioned. 'Clean and clear' and 'taste and odour' are key marketing campaigns for the company so for consistency, the word 'great' should be used to match the strapline: 'Clean, clear and great tasting.'

Our drinking water is clean, clear and tastes good.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We provide a reliable and sufficient supply of water.

Our people said:

This tells customers there will always be water there and it's reliable. Employees also said this means if they are on standby they work quickly to fix problems. They weren't keen on the word 'sufficient', saying that it didn't quite land right. One employee thought we could add in 'wholesome' drinking water.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Respondents felt this Outcome meant NW/ESW provided a constant supply of water; that the word 'reliable' meant that water would always flow if the tap was on. The word 'sufficient' meant that water would be unrestricted for the majority of respondents. Some think 'sufficient' means pipework maintenance to make sure water isn't wasted from a leak in a pipe but others think it means the supply is less than they would like it be with limited or restricted availability of water. Most wanted to keep the original wording, one location suggested adding 'to your home and community' and another said the word 'sufficient' could be taken out.

"Water will always flow when you turn on the tap, no shortages, and back up plans in place as well as reliable infrastructure."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

All thought this was clear and meant enough water / water is always there when you turn on the tap. Only two thought it meant quality / clean. The others all knew it was enough water and a 24/7 supply.

Our stakeholders said:

They weren't sure 'sufficient' works. One suggested: 'We ensure that water supplies meet the needs of the communities we serve'. They thought the statement showed the company meets demand, provides water as required and that the water supply is rarely, if ever interrupted or fails.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The majority knew this was about the supply of the water, rather than the quality.
- This was a low priority, with the majority not wanting to change the wording at all but there was confusion around the word 'sufficient' and one area said to remove it.
- The only word that divided opinion was 'sufficient'.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

What one person deems to be 'sufficient' is different to another and for that reason, it is recommended that this subjective word is removed and the statement could be improved to:

We always provide a reliable supply of water.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We provide excellent service and impress our customers.

Our people said:

They defined excellent service as going over and beyond, doing everything we can to help as quickly as possible. Employees think that our customers know our people will follow up what we say we will do for them. They did point out that not all customers are 'impressed' and it's difficult to define that as what may impress one, doesn't impress another.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

This was a priority – everyone wanted this Outcome statement to be re-worded. The majority suggested this should be evidenced or tested in some way and some said they would like to see a percentage or number attached to this Outcome (although that is more a performance commitment than an Outcome).

The main issue people had was around the word 'impress'. This word was too strong / over the top for customers and some described it as 'cringe-worthy'. The respondents thought this statement to be overconfident, arrogant and bragging and noted that to be impressive, you have to over deliver every single time.

"They must have asked customers but need to back this up. Excellent customer service is thought to be impressive but not the water itself. How can you impress with a water supply? Fixing pipes and providing water is just what they're supposed to do."

They also noted that the company is trying to provide quality service for their customers – it isn't up to the company to decide what customers think is excellent, nor whether they are impressed. Three out of five areas chose to keep the word 'excellent' though.

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

The customers all understand this Outcome but found easier ways to describe what it means to them. Excellent service to most meant answering phone calls quickly and being polite and helpful during the call. They also thought it is a bold statement and a little boastful.

Our stakeholders said:

The statement means that services are delivered on time, are of good quality and above expectations. They think providing excellent service is providing a service that's hard to fault. They also deemed excellent service as responding swiftly to calls and having well trained and polite people that impress customers with knowledge, awareness and professionalism. Some of the stakeholders also didn't like the word 'impressed'.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Customers wanted this to be re-worded as a high priority.
- Remove 'impress our customers'.
- Find better way to describe what is meant by excellent service without being boastful.
- Say it is the company's aim or evidence that it's true if we have proof.

OUTCOMES **LANGUAGE REVIEW**

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback, the statement could be improved to:

Our customers tell us we provide excellent customer service and resolve issues quickly.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: Our customers consider the services they receive to be value for money

Our people said:

Employees say this statement means customers understand the services we give but note that it's difficult to define what some people think is good value for money, others don't. They also added that most customers don't see our service so if they've never had any issues with their water, they won't know what services we offer.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Everyone agreed that 'the services' covers everything the company does – more than just providing the water but also the customer service element and pipe maintenance for example. Most felt this Outcome meant that the service received was worth the money that they pay on their bills. Some respondents felt this should be measured in some way with a customer satisfaction survey to back up the Outcome with facts. The phrase 'value for money' meant being happy with the service received compared to the money they paid. A few of the locations suggested adding 'good' in front of the words 'value for money' to show this is a positive thing.

"Value for money doesn't imply the cheapest; you get your money's worth. They are being fair and not ripping you off."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

People understand that this means you get what you pay for, but if they don't think they are getting good value for money then they take exception to being told that they do. Some think 'the services' is referring to the water and some think it's about the customer service. They think 'value for money' means reasonable, affordable and worth it.

Our stakeholders said:

This statement means people think the charges for services are fair and that they get good service at an acceptable price. This is clear. 'Value for money' could mean in comparison to other utilities.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Don't speak on behalf of the customers – give evidence that we know this to be true.
- Most think it's clear what is meant by 'the services'.
- Add 'good' to 'value for money'.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback, the statement could be improved to:

Our customers say our services are good value for money.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: Our customers are well informed about the services they receive and the value of water.

Our people said:

Employees say this statement means our customers are kept up to date. They weren't keen on the word 'value', deeming it to be ambiguous. They questioned whether the statement meant the cost of the water or the fact that we'd die without it.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Most respondents felt this Outcome meant that customers were informed about what NW/ESW does and thought the words 'well informed' meant the company is providing information to customers to educate them and keep them up to date. When talking about 'the services' they thought that covered everything, including customer services, billing and water and sewerage (NW) provisions. However, 'the value of water' had two meanings for customers – one being the preciousness of the resource, and the other being the monetary cost of the water. Everyone wanted to re-word this – it was a high priority. They felt that it could focus more on the importance of water and respecting water.

"Well informed' means they keep you up to date and educate you. They communicate well and websites are informative and up to date. The value of water has two meanings."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

Customers understand the language but don't necessarily feel well informed themselves and aren't too sure about the value of water bit. They told us they get it is about understanding that water needs to be paid for and we need to tell customers what they are getting for their money.

Our stakeholders said:

They questioned if it was about valuing the water supply / scarcity of its provision or the cost. The stakeholders said the company can provide clear and regular information about how important water is in our lives, and what happens in communities without access to it, but it's up to the customer to decide if they feel well informed or not. They also noted that Outcomes are best when they address one issue not two.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The value of water has two meanings.
- High priority for re-write.
- The customer decides if they are well informed, rather than us telling them they are.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback, the statement could be improved to:

Our customers say they feel informed about the services we provide and the importance of water.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We provide a sewerage service that deals effectively with sewage and heavy rainfall (NW only).

Our people said:

They think the way a customer views this statement depends if the customer has experienced flooding or not, and that if they have this could be a difficult statement to swallow. Employees note that some customers think flooding is the Environment Agency's responsibility, not ours. They also think customers won't know the difference between sewage and grey water and what we do with it so wouldn't be able to describe the service as effective.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Everyone felt this meant the company is able to deal with varying demands for wastewater without any problems. They felt the company isn't as confident with this Outcome. They understood what was meant by 'provide a sewerage service' saying it means waste is dealt with promptly and in the right manner. 'Effectively' implies the job is taken seriously. No one strongly wanted to change this Outcome.

"They aren't bigging themselves up, saying it's excellent or brilliant service. They sort things out if there is a blockage. It's quite self-explanatory."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

Everyone thought this was clear and means we deal with toilet waste and rainfall and can cope with more than average rainfall quickly, can cope with sewer flooding and we make sure the drains don't smell.

Our stakeholders said:

Stakeholders think this means the company can manage to remove and treat human waste even under difficult operating conditions, such as heavy rainfall, in an efficient, timely and cost effective manner. They added that it says it doesn't all end up in the rivers or floating down the streets in extreme conditions. They are confident the company provides the network of pipes and plant and have installed a system that should deal with weather fluctuations; ready in an emergency should they fail.

KEY FINDINGS:

- No one wanted to change this statement.
- The wording conveys how seriously this job is taken.
- The tone is right in terms of not sounding boastful but still being impressive.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

In the interests of the statements reading as a suite, this can be improved to:

Our sewerage service deals with sewage and heavy rainfall effectively.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We help to improve the quality of rivers and coastal waters for the benefit of people, the environment and wildlife.

Our people said:

This means we look after the environment and bathing waters. They mentioned there is always something in the news to say things are getting better e.g. surfers aren't getting ill anymore. They think customers would deem this to mean if there's a pollution incident, the company deals with it straight away; we've addressed environmental issues and spend time and money on improving the environment. Employees did note that the statement doesn't say how we help to improve the quality and that it could say we can prove it; you can see how good our bathing waters are.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

All said it meant the company is environmentally conscious and take responsibility for the impact they have on taking water and returning it back to the environment. It hints that the company is part of a bigger picture. They know it means the effective treatment of wastewater and the only suggested change was to clarify the statement was focused on the water that is returned to the environment. Some people said take 's' off the end of the words to make more sense but the majority were happy with this statement and felt it was a low priority for change as it made sense.

"It's telling you they aren't just involved in your tap water, it's a much bigger scale. They're treating and cleaning the wastewater before pumping it back out. Everyone enjoys the benefits and people can partake in leisure activities on the beach and in rivers."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

The majority found this really easy and clear – they understood the meaning and said the Outcome seems to give a positive perception about the company. Only one or two said at first they didn't understand the whole sentence but they did once it was broken down.

Our stakeholders said:

Stakeholders felt the wording for this was clear and appropriate.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Well understood / low priority for change.
- Gives a positive perception of the company.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE: None.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We protect and enhance the environment in delivering our services, leading by example.

Our people said:

The statement shows that we consider the environment first and don't knowingly put it at risk. They think the wording is spot on; it sums up what the company does to enhance the water. The wording implies the company will look after the environment and not leave it for other people to pick up. Some noted 'Leading by example' seems superfluous and tagged on. Employees suggested it could say 'improve' rather than 'enhance' and 'in everything we do' rather than 'delivering our services'.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

The majority thought the company considered the environment in its business decisions and had high aspirations for leading the way environmentally – the one other companies look up to be being ahead of the game. 'Protect and enhance' means that not only does the company try not to damage the environment, but that any alterations are left in a better state than before NW/ESW's involvement. 'Delivering our services' was taken to mean the provision of water and duties such as pipe management and sewage treatment. Customer did say it needs some clarity. Some think of wildlife and others about greenhouse gases. They weren't sure what the environmental targets were – whether it was saving energy or reducing carbon footprint. Changes suggested adding 'whilst' or 'through'.

"Pioneering, an innovative role model. But there's no mention of energy or carbon footprint."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

There was some confusion here. Some didn't like the word 'enhance' and felt it should be replaced by 'take care'. 'Leading by example' was well received and provoked positive thoughts.

Our stakeholders said:

The statement makes sense.

KEY FINDINGS:

- This statement was a medium priority for change but what the alterations should be were split.
- Some want more clarity on how the company protects the environment.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback, the statement could be improved to:

We take care to protect and improve the environment in everything we do, leading by example.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We are an efficient and innovative company.

Our people said:

Employees think this wording is clear and shows the company is embracing new technology and always moving forward looking to save money. However, they think customers might think the company is spending money rather than lowering their bills. Our people think this is a fair statement but are not sure customers would see this.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Customers think this means we are good at saving money with new ideas and that the company is not standing still, it's always trying to improve. 'Efficient' could mean no waste and it could also mean low cost and that we stand well against competitors. Customer said 'innovative' means looking to the future – finding better ways of doing things as well as moving with the times. 'Innovative' also means investing in new technologies. They suggested we could add in that we will continue to be these things in the future.

The minority queried how this statement is proven and what evidence shows this? They noted that if the statement came from a customer viewpoint it wouldn't look so much like blowing your own trumpet but the majority suggested no changes.

"New ideas, new scenarios, things they are investing in, new products and different services."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

Most thought this meant NW / ESW is a healthy company, doing the job well. 'Efficient' meant money saving to everyone. There was some confusion over what was meant by 'innovation'.

Our stakeholders said:

This is clear and makes sense.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Overall the majority were happy with the wording and considered this was a low priority for change.
- Evidence to prove the statement would be beneficial.
- Clarity needed around the meaning of 'efficient' – whether this means lack of waste or at a low cost.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE: None.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: Our finances are sound, stable and achieve a fair balance between customers and investors.

Our people said:

They didn't like the words 'fair' or 'investors' and thought the statement should focus more on the investments and what we're doing to improve. Employees said this Outcome wording showed the company isn't spending profits frivolously, money from bills is not all going back to owners; we're ethical and honest. They also said it showed the company as a viable operation and in a good position / not in debt. Our people said this means we'll treat customers fairly, provide value for money and not raise our prices.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Most said they feel they are in safe hands and the company won't go bust overnight. They thought the wording meant costs will remain stable and customers will not be charged too much. 'Sound and stable' means that finances won't fluctuate, they are predictable and steady. The statement tells customers there is a low risk – the company is sensible and a safe bet. Equal thought is given to customers and investors so everyone is happy and getting a fair deal. Only one area proposed a small tweak to this Outcome – add the word 'remain' to show longevity.

"They're not ripping anyone off. Prices aren't going to shoot up, they will stay level."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

The Outcome was generally well understood. Some customers didn't like 'a fair balance' though.

Our stakeholders said:

Stakeholders say our finances are well managed and customers are not asked to pay excessive bills to allow us to pay shareholders. They recognise the company's need to balance stakeholder's expectations of income with keeping costs down for customers. This Outcome shows the company thinks it has struck that balance well, but notes that stakeholders and customers aren't really in a position to judge that.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Well understood – low priority for change.
- Conveys the right message.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

None.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We are proud to contribute to the success of local communities.

Our people said:

Employees know this is about volunteering and sponsorships – Just an Hour – and that we are proud to give back to our local communities but think that customers won't hear about it as much as they do about saving money. They think customers don't know the extent of what we do and that we don't just help big charities because from this statement it's not apparent how much we do to support local communities. The word 'contribute' sounds like it is just about money. Our people also said it's not clear exactly how success is defined.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Everyone knew it meant giving to the local community in some way but a variety of different contributions were suggested – wildlife and nature conservation, sponsorship, employment and charity. There was some confusion around who the local communities were, and confusion whether 'contribute' referred to money or time. Customers asked if it was educational or funding or helping people and working in schools. 'Success' for local communities could be facilities or jobs.

"It sounds like special environmental projects. It could be made clearer that they encourage and support staff to contribute. They've dimmed it down, but really they need to sell it. Talk about community projects through volunteer work."

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

Most thought this was clear but said we could use 'give' instead of 'contribute'. They also suggested the statement could tell them more about the end result. Some of the customers thought 'contribute' meant financial giving and others think it means helping / improving the area.

Our stakeholders said:

They think it's clear the company invests time and financial resources into the local area. The Outcomes shows we care about the wellbeing of people and their immediate environment within your operational areas. Stakeholders also said it shows staff are encouraged to volunteer and participate in charitable activities.

KEY FINDINGS:

- There is confusion around what we are giving – time or money.
- It isn't clear what the success is that the Outcome refers to.
- The majority of customers wanted to change the wording of this statement to improve the clarity.
- Customers felt this was one area where the company could shout more about the good work its employees are doing across their operating areas.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback, the statement could be improved to:

We are proud to support our communities by giving time and resources to their important causes.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We work in partnership towards common goals.

Our people said:

Employees think this wording is not clear and describe it as a curious statement. They question what the goals are and what the partnerships are. Our people think there is no substance to this Outcome and it would be better to say 'We're one team, we all work together'.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

There was lots of confusion around this Outcome, even after it was explained in detail and everyone wanted this Outcome to be re-worded because they all felt it was vague and needed more detail to understand what it meant. They said it isn't clear from the statement who the company teams up with or what the goals are. They assume it means whoever we work with that both parties want to see a similar result from the work they do together.

"Is it certain businesses, agencies or communities? Is it about outsourcing work to third parties? Who are you collaborating with? Councils or the Environment Agency? Do all the utility companies get together to dig holes in the roads at the same time to minimise disruption?"

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

Customer said they don't know who we work with – other companies or customers or do we mean working with sewerage companies? Someone asked 'are partners being paid for my bill'? The wording itself is clear but doesn't offer any explanation and they don't know which partnerships or which goals we are referring to.

Our stakeholders said:

Stakeholders understood this a little better and said it meant the company works with partners, companies, agencies and individuals who have shared objectives and want to communicate it to their constituents.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The words are clear but people don't know what the goals are or who we are working in partnership with.
- This was the most confusing Outcome to customers.
- Needs a lot more detail to ensure clarity.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback, the statement could be improved to:

We work in partnership with companies and organisations to achieve the goals that are most important to our customers.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

CURRENT OUTCOME: We are a company that customers trust.

Our people said:

Employees think this says that we do what we say; you can believe in us. They think the wording conveys that customers can have confidence in us to make the right decisions.

Our informed customers from the focus groups said:

Customers say this Outcomes means NW / ESW is honest and truthful and will do what they say they are going to do. They think it shows there is trust in the product and the service as it refers to honesty, accuracy and fairness of billing as well as safe and quality products, e.g. the drinking water. Some suggested it should say people do trust the company already; customers and stakeholders alike.

“Bills will be accurate and fair. They aren’t going to rip you off. Their water is safe to drink and won’t make you ill.”

Our uninformed customers on Flo, said:

Most customer said they do trust the company but some say they have no choice as they can’t use another supplier. They use the word ‘honest’ a lot. They describe trust in terms of reputation, word of mouth, past experience, telling the truth, giving good service and explaining bills.

Our stakeholders said:

The wording suggest the company can be relied on to meet its statements of purpose and to deliver on its promises. The statement tells customers the company is open and honest about its operations. Stakeholders think this statement is clear and describe ‘trust’ as being consistent, open and transparent in dealings with customers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Customers liked the wording and ‘trust’ conjures up positive perceptions.
- The changes suggested were to add personal pronouns to soften the statement – e.g. ‘our’ customers or ‘you’ trust.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE:

Following customer feedback across all the statements that they were looking for evidence and for the company not to speak on behalf of its customers, the statement could be improved to:

Our customers say we are a company they trust.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

RECOMMENDED DRAFT NEW STATEMENTS

Current Outcome	Proposed change
We deliver water and sewerage services that meet the needs of current and future generations in a changing world.	We provide safe, clean drinking water and effective sewerage services; now, and for future generations.
We supply clean, clear drinking water that tastes good.	Our drinking water is clean, clear and tastes good.
We provide a reliable and sufficient supply of water.	We always provide a reliable supply of water.
We provide excellent service and impress our customers.	Our customers tell us we provide excellent customer service and resolve issues quickly.
Our customers consider the services they receive to be value for money.	Our customers say our services are good value for money.
Our customers are well informed about the services they receive and the value of water.	Our customers say they feel informed about the services we provide and the importance of water.
We provide a sewerage service that deals effectively with sewage and heavy rainfall.	Our sewerage service deals with sewage and heavy rainfall effectively.
We help to improve the quality of rivers and coastal waters for the benefit of people, the environment and wildlife.	We help to improve the quality of rivers and coastal waters for the benefit of people, the environment and wildlife. (no change)
We protect and enhance the environment in delivering our services, leading by example.	We take care to protect and improve the environment in everything we do, leading by example.
We are an efficient and innovative company.	We are an efficient and innovative company. (no change)
Our finances are sound, stable and achieve a fair balance between customers and investors.	Our finances are sound, stable and achieve a fair balance between customers and investors. (no change)
We are proud to contribute to the success of local communities.	We are proud to support our communities by giving time and resources to their important causes.
We work in partnership towards common goals.	We work in partnership with companies and organisations to achieve the goals that are most important to our customers.
We are a company that customers trust.	Our customers say we are a company they trust.

OUTCOMES LANGUAGE REVIEW

APPENDIX A

BEST PRACTICE IN OTHER INDUSTRIES

Gas – ‘Treating Customers Fairly’ is the promise statement used across the gas industry.

EDF Energy has ‘Our Customer Commitments’ – Fair Value, and Better Service and Simplicity. How they treat customers fairly: The Trust Test, High standards for every customer, Tackling complaints head on, Demanding the best from everyone we work with, Looking after our most vulnerable customers.

At ScottishPower they believe in ‘Treating Customers Fairly’ and do this best by listening to their customers, and delivering what they think customers want and expect from them. Through feedback they’ve identified customers want them to be:

- Easy to deal with
- There when you need us
- Fair and socially responsible
- Value for money

E.ON calls it ‘Our customer statement’. They have a customer statement for domestic customers, one for SMEs and one for large energy users. They worked with customers and employees to seek to define what fair treatment felt like:

- Being honest with you – giving you simple, clear and accurate information so that you can make informed decisions.
- Saying sorry if we make a mistake – telling you promptly how and when we’ll put things right, and keeping you informed of progress.
- Making it easy for you to contact us, because we know your time is precious, and communicating with you in an easy to understand language and in a way of your choice.
- Giving you help to meet your energy needs, like ways to help you use less.
- Listening to you so that we focus on improving the things that are important.

In all of the above, the promises to customers are short and easy to understand in plain English. There aren’t too many – five is the average number of promise statements.

Simple brands

Market research has found that 62% of consumers will pay more for a simple experience. A customer centric brand has to understand that life is short and customers don’t have a lot of time on their hands so keeping communications short and simple will encourage better engagement.

In the UK, **Ovo Energy** is the disruptor with the simplest proposition: Fall in love with simplicity. *OVO started as an idea around the kitchen table. A couple of friends listing what they wanted from their energy supplier, but weren’t getting. Things like fair pricing. Great service. Clear and simple information. Technology to make managing your energy easier. And above all, honesty and openness.* Everything they communicate to customers is in plain English:

https://www.ovoenergy.com/?channel=ppcbrand&ds_kids=p6290742909&qclid=CNvfna7M89ECFYK87QodDHYFhw&qclsrc=aw.ds