



# **CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR WATER**

## **Minutes of the Board Meeting**

### **Public Session**

**Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

**Canterbury Cathedral Lodge, The Precincts, Canterbury**

<b>Present</b>	Chair	Dame Yve Buckland
	English Regional Committee Chairs	David Bland Catherine Harvey Charles Howeson
	Independent Member	Timothy Hornsby Mike Barnes Narendra Makanji
	Chief Executive	Tony Smith
	Secretary to the Board	Steven Harrison
	In attendance :	
	Head of Consumer Relations	Carl Pegg
	Head of Corporate Services	Jane Morris

**1. Apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Janet Paraskeva, Richard Sturt and Diane McCrea.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 Charles Howeson declared his interest as a trustee of the estates of the 19<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset.

**3. Minutes of the public Board meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007**

- 3.1 The minutes of the public Board meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2007 were **approved** as an accurate record of the meeting.

- 3.2 There were no matters arising.

**4. Water resources in the south of England – perspectives from water companies**

- 4.1 Each of the five companies in the Southern region gave a short presentation on a topic of particular current relevance to them.

- 4.2 **Southern Water** – communicating with customers during the drought – the use of the media, styles of communication, working in collaboration, successful outcomes for the consumer.

- 4.3 **South East Water** – operational challenges facing water companies – resource development, groundwater schemes, pipeline planning challenges, implementation challenges.

- 4.4 **Mid Kent Water** – water efficiency and a tariff trial with Hillmeed Homes – trialling water efficient goods in the home – trialling alternative tariffs.

- 4.5 **Folkestone and Dover Water** – a pilot study being conducted in Lydd with the metering of consumers from April 2008 to March 2009.

- 4.6 **Portsmouth Water** – the Havent Thicket reservoir scheme – the project background, preparatory work, planning applications and progress to date.

**5. Annual customer complaints report**

- 5.1 The Head of Consumer Relations presented his annual report to update the Board on the complaints received by CCWater for the year 2006-07. He explained that last year saw the largest number of complaints since 1993-1994. Complaints totalled 13,603 compared to 12,340 the previous year, suggesting customer service with some water companies saw a downward trend. Complaints remained steady for some offices. Others have seen a significant increase. A new billing system in

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Southern Water caused a late surge in complaints to the London office. The report looked specifically at complaint categories, handling outcomes and performance measures/consumer satisfaction.

5.2 He further explained that despite the increase in complaint and enquiry numbers, the report showed that CCWater outperformed its performance targets. For 2007-08 CCWater will continue to seek improvement in customer satisfaction results and benchmark itself against similar organisations.

5.3 The Board **noted** the report

5.4 In discussion the Board **agreed** that many complaints stemmed from companies' introductions of new billing systems that encountered problems and CCWater should formally write to Water UK to highlight its concern about the introduction of such new systems and question what was being done to mitigate the risks.

5.5 The chair of the Southern region explained that Southern Water had recently introduced a new billing system and because of errors consumers were encountering with their bills, the number of complaints being received by the CCWater office had increased considerably. The company had offered to pay for a temporary extra member of staff in the CCWater office to help cope with the increased workload.

5.6 After a short discussion the Board **agreed** that CCWater should accept Southern Water's offer to pay for a temporary member of staff.

## 6. Chief Executive Report

6.1 The Chief Executive highlighted key points from the report:

- **Safe, reliable water supply** – CCWater's work on helping get the customer's voice to drive the industry's regulators' and government's initiatives on securing long term water supplies continued, mainly through our involvement in the ministerially led Water Saving Group.
- **Value for Money** – The organisation continues to gear up its work on ensuring customers priorities and views are central to the next water price review that ends in 2009.
- **Speaking up for water consumers** - CCWater has worked in the areas of: Ofwat's consultation as a financial penalty against United Utilities, the Water Framework Directive, the Competition Commission decision on the merger of Mid Kent Water and South East Water, and competition in the water industry.
- **Delivery benchmark high quality performance** - work has been undertaken to improve the organisation's complaint handling processes including a 'mystery shopper' exercise to test our complaint handling.
- **Leading and motivating the organisation** - work has proceeded with the pay and grading review for CCWater staff

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and the implementation of the agreed recommendations. Visits have been made to all offices to explain the changes being made to the benchmarking and appraisal systems and how CCWater will address the low starting salaries.

6.2 The Board **noted** the report

### 7. Finance report

7.1 The Chief Executive reported that in the first month of the new financial year to the end of April, 7% of the annual resources had been consumed with an under spend against the budget profile of £55k (12%). Finance is currently preparing for the year end final accounts. The National Audit Office's final audit of CCWater for the financial year 2006-07 will begin on 11 June.

7.2 The Board **noted** the report

**The meeting closed.**