

The background of the slide is a scenic landscape photograph. It shows a wide, green valley with a large body of water in the middle ground. The foreground is a grassy hillside. The sky is filled with large, white, fluffy clouds against a blue background.

Evaluating the UU website and Household Charging document

A WaterTalk research report prepared for United Utilities
August 2020

Background, approach and summary

Research background

The Household Charges Scheme is a formal document provided by United Utilities which explains in detail how water and sewerage services are charged to domestic customers.

Although there are elements of the contents that cannot change due to regulatory requirements, UU feels that the document is not especially customer friendly

UU would like to engage with customers to understand if and how they have or are likely to engage with this document, and how it might be made more 'user friendly'

It is however noted, that many customers' entry point to queries on charges (and subsequently locating the document), will be through the UU website

In addition to understanding customer reactions to the document, UU would like to explore how customers use the website to answer queries, and how well the document works with information on the site

Overall the research needs to provide direction on how the website could be evolved to better serve customer needs, and how the Charging Document can be enhanced to deliver better customer engagement

Research objectives

The overall objectives of the research are to:

- Understand what kind of queries customers tend to have on their bills and where they look for information
- Explore how customers use the website to find information on charging and other billing and support queries, and what are the barriers and enablers to finding the right information
- Elicit ways in which the website could be improved to help customers more easily find information relevant to them
- Understand awareness of the Charging Document / how customer bills are calculated
- Understand how customers have used information on the charges scheme in the past or may use the charges scheme information in the future
- Understand how useful customers find the Charging Document and what information is most useful to them
- Explore feedback on: language, relevance, tone of voice, content, format and flow of document, understanding of charges, pain points and reactions to potential improvements

The outputs must give clear direction as to how the document can be evolved to provide customers with better and more accessible information; this could include other ways of bringing the information to life, such as the use of video or an interactive 'clickable' document. The research must also provide feedback on how the website could be improved to better support customers in seeking information.

Our approach

About this report:

- The research approach used to address these objectives can be seen opposite
- This deck combines both stages of the work, and contains content based on both the 'accompanied surf' interviews, and the three-day pop-up community
- Some topics were covered by both interview and community fieldwork (e.g. reactions to UU bills, customer approaches to answering billing queries), other topics were covered by one or other methodology
- Throughout this document, we have combined findings from both stages where appropriate
- Research findings are presented using the following icons to indicate which stage of the research the findings have emerged from:



Accompanied surf
depth interviews



Pop-up
community




Combined
findings

What we did:

 **10 x accompanied surf depth interviews and a three day pop up community**

 **Fieldwork took place between Monday 27th July and Friday 7th August 2020**

 **25 Community Members (13 Males, 12 Females, 15 Measured, 10 Unmeasured)**

 **10 Interviewees (5 Males, 5 Females, 5 Measured, 5 Unmeasured)**

Executive overview

Executive overview (1)

- Many customers are **satisfied with the bills** they receive from United Utilities and there are only occasional queries that arise when a bill amount may not be what they are expecting
- Customers are not frequent users of the UU website, though they may refer to it if they have high level or non-urgent queries about a particular issue
- As an entry point for queries, the website **performs well in some areas and less well in others:**
 - Customers are able to relatively easily find responses to well defined queries such as ‘what financial support is available’ or ‘how to relocate a meter’; at the same time, some have to search through a **number of levels of links** to reach this information
 - Comprehensive information on how bills are calculated are more problematic; some customers admit that there is useful information and explanation in places, but the **information can be fractured and spread around different site locations**
 - Customers are generally **not keen to watch videos** on these topics, and it is noted that the explanation of how bills are structured, and the actual monetary charges themselves, **appear on different pages**

Executive overview (2)

- Customers either implicitly or explicitly highlight a number of areas in which the website can **hinder them from finding and engaging with information**
 - The menu bar is felt to have **too many options**, and customers have different expectations of what 'My Account' and 'Help & Support' might contain
 - There is a lot of **plain text** at the top of webpages with **multiple links**; often FAQ material or other important information is found 'below the fold', and so is not always easily located
 - In some cases, customers take **circuitous routes** to find the information across multiple pages
 - The **search function** works for some, but does not always deliver the right kind of outputs
- There are calls to ensure the **website works harder** in allowing customers to easily find answers to queries

Executive overview (3)

- Overall, the charging document is thought to be a **useful resource**, although it is not seen as being particularly aimed at the **typical domestic customer**; it is not the intuitive point of entry for looking up information on billing, and customers do not locate it easily
- Most customers would expect and want to find responses to typical queries on the **UU website** rather than having to resort to using the document
 - There are suggestions that it may be more **suitable as a reference document** for UU customer service staff, or potentially landlords or property developers; in some cases, for UU customers that have some form of dispute
 - This is in part down to the perceived **complex nature** of some of the contents, and the overall 'density' and design of the document
- That said, most customers are relatively **easily able to solve queries** about their water supply and related issues by using the document
 - Though customers who sought to clarify the basis of unmeasured charges found that the document gave an incomplete picture

Executive overview (4)

- In its current form, the document is **not something that customers feel they would particularly wish to engage with**; there's an expectation that most queries could be solved via the website
 - While some feel it does its intended job reasonably well, others think it could work harder
- There is a particular appetite to provide:
 - **Improved visuals and design**, with a greater use of colour / shading to break up sections / text
 - **More intuitive navigation**, including highlighting the clickable links and providing a 'return to index' button
 - **Key summaries** up front in simpler language that can subsequently direct people to the detail
- The **proposed changes play out well for most**, and reflect the changes that customers had spontaneously suggested
- The **infographic bill breakdown is well received** (with some suggestions for enhancement); most would prefer to see this on their bill and on the website, rather than in the charging document

A number of changes could potentially benefit the document to help customers engage with it more closely

Clearer definition of sections

Breaking up sections into different shaded blocks, with spacing, will help customers navigate and locate individual sections more easily than with the currently dense plain black and white formatting

Greater use of colour

Many customers feel that the lack of colour in the document can put people off – the bill is provided as an example of a UU document that draws the eye and that customers find engaging

A streamlined contents page

Although not unanimous, many customer find that a more stripped back contents page would be desirable; in its current extended form it can be off-putting

Clearly signposted clickable links

Customers would like to be able to navigate more easily throughout the document with clickable links; these should be clearly signposted as such

An upfront summary of charging models

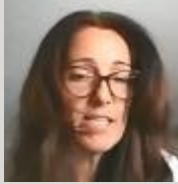
A short summary of the information contained in the document and the three charging models would be welcome, before customers engage with the fuller details

A streamlined FAQ section

There is a clear appetite for an FAQ section; some feel this should be included in the document, and there is a considerable appetite for a 'collapsible' FAQ on the website

Customer water use

We spoke to a variety of customer and household types for this research; some examples can be seen below



- **Mel** is 51 and lives on her own in Preston in an unmetered one bedroom house
- She feels her water use is relatively low – she only uses a shower and ‘rarely’ washes her car

I do 12 hour shifts, so it's weird with my house, but my water usage is always back to front because you always want a water meter, but it works out I would pay more

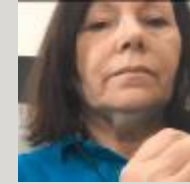
35-54, Unmeasured



- **Omar** lives with his wife and two young children, one of them born in lockdown
- They are in a metered property and conscious about water use, but recent circumstances have seen their water use rise considerably

We just had a newborn last week. Since [lockdown] we have been using noticeably more, and just washing our hands more. So I think water use has definitely gone up!

18-34, Measured



- **Anne** is ‘over 55!’ and lives with her husband near Blackpool, with her children having flown the nest
- Ann has a meter and is careful about the water they use, though a recent leak left her with a much higher than expected bill

Just myself and my husband. We do keep an eye on how much we use... and they got in touch with us before we got our bill to warn us that our usage was surprisingly high.

55+, Unmeasured

Customer bills



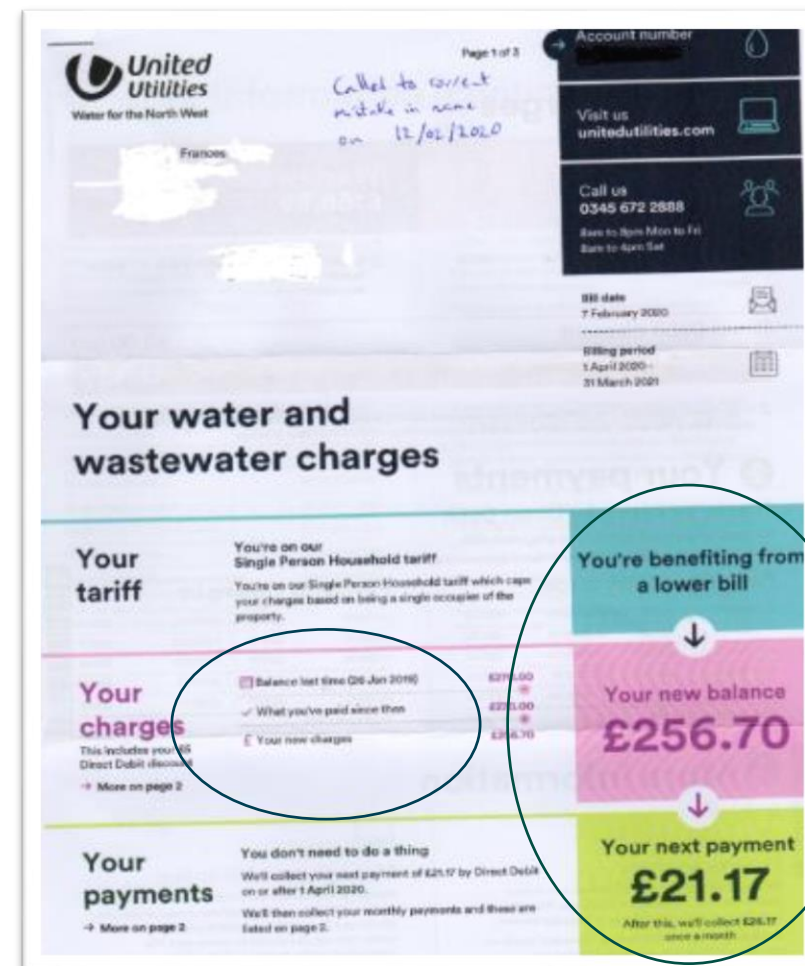
Customer reactions to UU bills are largely positive, with many calling them out as an example of best practise

United Utilities

- **Colour coding** allows for easy navigation around the page, and highlights key areas of focus for the reader
- **Clear spacing and descriptive signposting** all helps to ensure customers understand their bills
- **The clear direct language** led by the lack of jargon, makes it difficult for key information to be misunderstood

The [UU] bill clearly stated the tariff I am on, the amount I paid last year and will pay this year and how much it will cost me each month. Nice and simple.
35-54, Measured

I like to understand bills visually and the United Utilities bill is extremely well set out and has excellent explanations of the way the bill is calculated.
55+, Measured

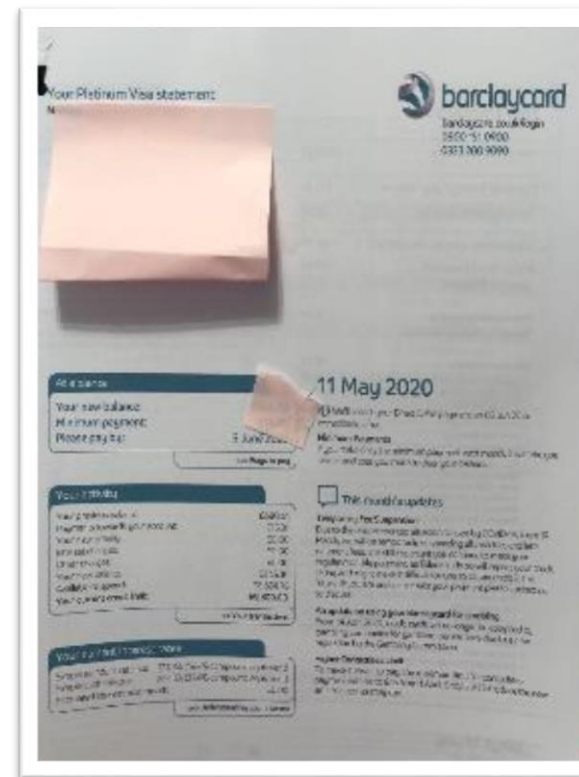


Customers also cited a number of other bills, focusing on the layout and language provided



- **Layout** – The use of boxes helps to segment key information, with appropriate signposting works well.
- **Language** - Which is simple and straight to the point but without being talked down to.
- **Simple information** – The page should be felt to only include key information, in order to avoid information overload and confusion.

Barclaycard



British Gas

| Your account in detail | |
|--|--|
| Your previous balance on 22 Dec 2019 | £46.59 |
| Total energy costs | |
| Gas | |
| Gas meter number: 119467 | |
| 22 Dec 2019 - 20 Jan 2020 | 1622.57kWh at 2.822p per kWh £45.98 |
| 1811 - estimated meter reading | |
| 1862 - estimated meter reading | |
| 51 gas units at 29.6 calorific value | |
| Standing charge | £5.73 |
| 30 days at 19.13p per day | |
| 21 Jan 2020 - 23 Feb 2020 | 1941.92kWh at 2.495p per kWh £48.45 |
| 1862 - estimated meter reading at tariff change | |
| 1923 - you gave us your meter reading | |
| 51 gas units at 29.6 calorific value | |
| Standing charge | £4.80 |
| 34 days at 14.12p per day | |
| 22 Dec 2019 - 25 Feb 2020 | Total Gas costs £104.96 |
| Gas VAT at 5.00% | £5.24 |
| Total gas costs (including VAT) £110.20 | |
| Electricity | |
| Electricity meter number: 6104M1515 | |
| 22 Dec 2019 - 20 Jan 2020 | 377kWh at 14.18p per kWh £53.29 |
| 3738 - estimated meter reading | |
| 3725 - estimated meter reading | |
| Standing charge | £5.78 |
| 30 days at 19.27p per day | |
| 21 Jan 2020 - 23 Feb 2020 | 408kWh at 13.22p per kWh £53.19 |
| 3725 - estimated meter reading at tariff change | |
| 3833 - you gave us your meter reading | |
| Standing charge | £5.64 |
| 34 days at 16.60p per day | |
| 22 Dec 2019 - 23 Feb 2020 | Total Electricity costs £119.90 |
| Electricity VAT at 5.00% | £9.99 |
| Total Electricity costs (including VAT) £129.89 | |
| Total energy costs (including VAT) £236.09 | |
| Your payments | |
| 3 Jan 2020 | Direct Debit £77.50 CR |
| 10 Feb 2020 | Direct Debit £77.50 CR |
| Total payments - Thank you £155.00 CR | |
| Your new balance on 23 Feb 2020 | £127.68 |

But I like the simplicity of the Barclaycard bill. If there is such a thing it is 'intuitive' to read. Rather like a newspaper.

35-54, Measured

Minimalistic and very clean layout at first glance. I can then probe further if I want more detail.

16-34, Measured

However, there are some bills which don't resonate so well with customers due to being overly complex and difficult to understand



- **Cluttered** – The inclusion of information which customers deem 'unessential' can clutter the page, with readers needing to work harder to find the right information
- **Too granular** – Costs which are broken down further can add confusion when customers want to know the basic costs upfront
- **Different type of costings** – Different unit costs or payment dates can confuse matters further

I think the worst to try understand is actually a sky bill (although I'm not with sky, my partner is so I've seen his bills). The breakdown is actually more confusing than the summary

Measured, 35-54

My virgin bill is a more confusing mix of line rental and TV subscriptions for the month ahead, with telephone calls from the previous month.

Unmeasured, 35-54

Tonik

Your Energy Statement

| | | |
|---|-----------------|---------------|
| Balance at your last statement 24 March 2020 | -£111.84 | Credit |
| Charges | | |
| Dual fuel discount | -£3.36 | Credit |
| Energy Charges up to 23 April 2020 | £160.09 | |
| Standing Charges up to 20 April 2020 | £36.64 | |
| Subtotal | £192.37 | |
| Off in 2020 | -£3.75 | |
| Total charges for this period | £204.86 | |
| Payments & Credits | | |
| Payment on 22 March 2020 - thank you | -£76.77 | Credit |
| Payment on 27 April 2020 - thank you | -£76.77 | Credit |
| Interest Received | -£3.88 | Credit |
| Payment on 30 May 2020 (Offer 010 0020217) | -£49.08 | Credit |
| Payment on 30 May 2020 (Offer 010 0020212) | -£33.09 | Credit |
| Total Payments & Credits for this period | -£239.59 | Credit |
| New Account Balance | -£139.07 | Credit |

Your monthly Direct Debit payment of £76.77 will be taken from your account on 24 May 2020.

Do you have a question about your bill? Visit www.tonikenergy.com/help or email help@tonikenergy.com. You can also call on 0333 244 2336.

Granular detail will often be needed, but in order for the bill to be understood quickly and at a glance, simplified summary sections and upfront basic details should be prioritised.



Typical Queries

Time reviewing a bill is minimal, and largely focused on ensuring the amount matches their expectations



How are water bills typically paid?

- Typically paid by monthly direct debit
- Comes annually or twice a year

How are water bills reviewed?

- Time spent reviewing a water bill will vary depending on the customer, with many only concerned with the basic amount
- Many customers are merely checking that bills are in line with expectations (especially among metered customers) or whether there are any 'surprises'
- As the water supplier is typically fixed, these bills are often paid less attention to in comparison to other utility bills

Paying by direct debit can have an effect on the level of attention paid to the billing, as it is easier to forget about the need to review your bill statement



I generally just check the cost of it but don't really look at the detail

35-54, Unmeasured

I do review my water bill when I receive it, I typically spend a few minutes checking over the info, seeing how long the payment terms are for.

16-34, Unmeasured

I'll probably just scan it quickly to check everything is as expected

55+, Unmeasured

Key customer queries related to bills, focus on the statement cost and how this is calculated



What is being queried?

There is a relatively low level of queries amongst customers as there is a basic understanding of billing costs; the fact it is generally the least costly bill may stop some from asking questions



How I can save on the water bill?

I do look for any special offers when I get a bill.

Measured, 55+

How are unmeasured and measured costs calculated?

I'm somewhat aware of how my bill is calculated as I have a water meter but would like more data.

Measured, 16-34

Why are charges high? Specifically why are standing charges are so high?

I do understand charges but am annoyed with standing charge, I'd rather it was purely based on volume used.

Measured, 35-54

How do each type of water contribute to overall cost? (wastewater and freshwater)

I have absolutely no idea how the fresh water and wastewater charges are calculated.

Measured, 55+

What do costs go towards?

Thinking about what proportion of the amount I pay is going towards fixing leaks, community projects, supporting vulnerable/low income customers.

Unmeasured 35-54

The first port of call for resolving queries would be for a customer to visit the United Utilities website, before resorting to calling an agent



Step 1

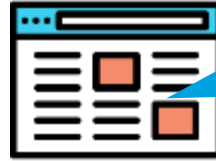


I would look firstly on the information given with the bill and then on the UU website.
Unknown, Unmeasured

If the bill is clear enough to understand it will be checked for the right information.

If phone contact details are found on the bill some customers may call straightaway, due to convenience of having number in front of them.

Step 2



If I was unsure on my invoice I would head to the FAQ section on the UU website.
Unmeasured, 16-34

Customers like being able to find information on the website.

FAQs are preferred as they are able to provide direct answers.

Live chats can also be sought after due to giving interaction without having to call.

Step 3



If I had any questions about my bill, I would call the customer services number on the front of the bill.
Unmeasured, 55+

Calling is often the last resort because customers do not want to have to go through the hassle of waiting times.

Calling may come from frustration or urgency for an answer.

Some may call if this is what they are more used to doing through experience.

Answering queries; the website

Customer experience of using the UU website was tested through the use of a number of queries

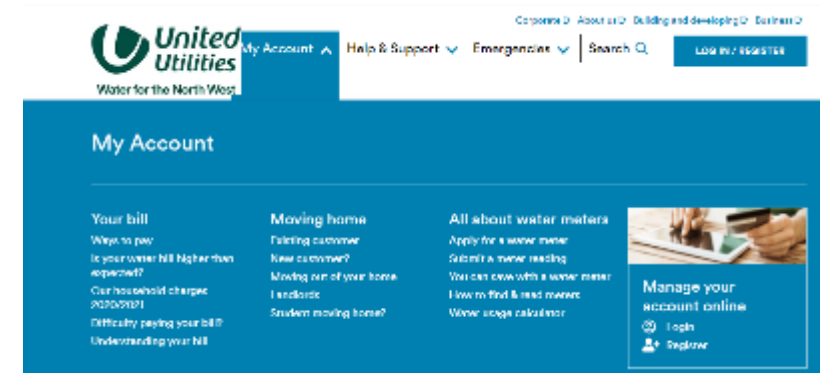


- Each customer was asked to complete 1-2 tasks, time dependent, to understand their approach to locating relevant information, answering queries and what the experience was like. Queries were as follows:
 - **A1)** – *How are your water charges calculated if you do not have a water meter? What are the charges made up of and what determines the amount you pay?*
 - **A2)** – *How are your water charges calculated if you have a meter? What are the charges made up of and what determines the amount you pay? What would be the options open to you if you did not think your meter was giving you an accurate picture of your consumption?*
 - **B)** – *What help is there if you required additional support due to age, ill health or disability? What are some of the different types of services available?*
 - **C)** – *What would you need to do if you were carrying out some home improvements and needed to move your water meter to a new location? What are the options open to you i.e. who is able to relocate the meter and what are the stages involved?*
 - **D)** – *What support is available if you were struggling to pay your water bill? What are the different conditions under which you would be eligible for help?*



There are a number of different approaches customers used to seek out information

- When approaching queries, it is striking that different customers use different approaches:
 - Some customer go directly to the menu at the top of the page and try various individual links
 - One customer is wedded to the use of the search box on the site, and continues to use it, even though results are not always what is intended
 - Google search is initially used by one customer, comprising of a query and the name 'United Utilities'



www.unitedutilities.com > Bills & payments ▾

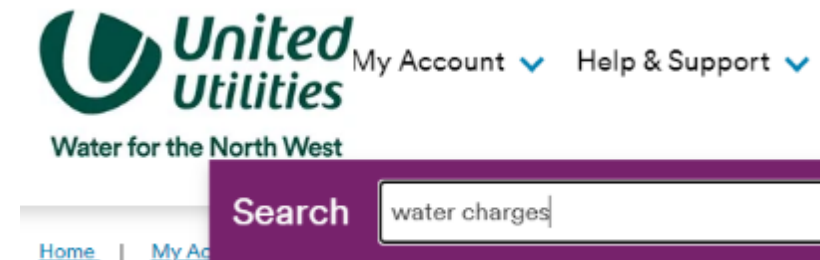
[How is my bill calculated? - United Utilities](#)

How is my bill calculated? The way we calculate your water bill will be based on whether or not you have a water meter ...

myaccount.unitedutilities.com > WaterUsageCalculator ▾

[Water usage calculator| My Account| United Utilities](#)

Welcome. We all like to make a saving - and one of the easiest ways to reduce your water bill is to apply for a meter.



Always use the search function, yes. It did come up eventually.

55+, Metered

The search engine does eventually find it.

35-54, Metered



Locating information on how bills are made up is relatively easy, but the structure of this information does not always deliver

- All customers can locate the 'understanding your bill' page, mainly through the menu headers
 - Though some click on some erroneous links first, including 'water usage calculator'
- Others may use a Google search or the search function – all located the correct page easily
- The video options take up much of the page; this can be problematic as many do not intuitively want to view this (see over)
- Some find the information below the video helpful to an extent; some do not instantly spot the Measured/Unmeasured links
 - Some customers have to be directed to these links for more detailed information

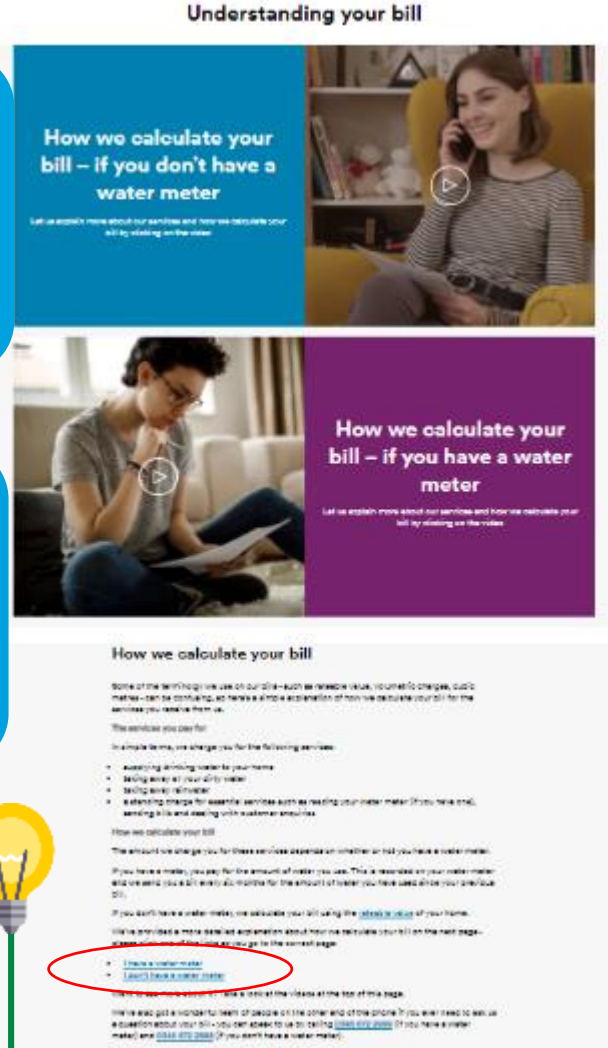
I'd want to come down here to water meter, unmeasured customers. Standing charges, not a lot about how they calculate it though to be honest.

18-34, Unmeasured

They're around three minute [videos]. Probably I wouldn't [watch] because they're not as useful as just being able to read something here.

18-34, Measured

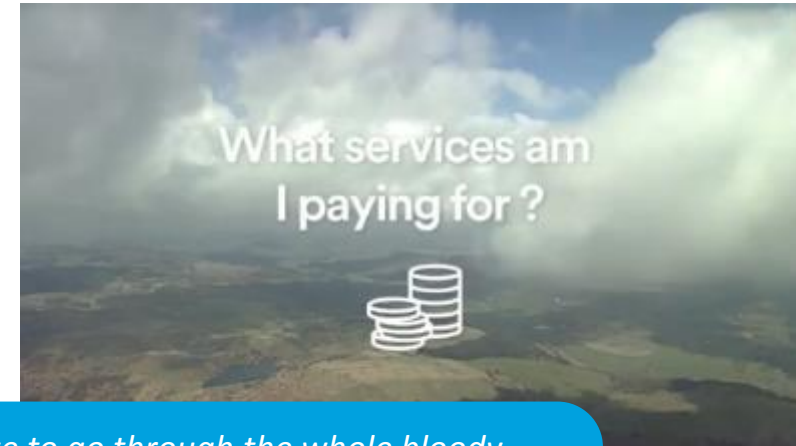
A number of customers note that they would like to see an *interactive* version of the bill – as this is something they are already familiar with and positive about



Videos are not felt to be the best way to locate information on billing for a number of reasons



- Many customers are not overly keen to use videos to solve queries
 - Some explicitly state that they would rather pinpoint the information they are looking for and read it themselves
- Customers do not have 'control' over the content of a video
 - And there is a degree of impatience evident when watching them
- Many take 'Understanding your bill' to be more focused on specifically what their charges relate
 - And so information on UU activities can detract from this and finding the right information rapidly



You have to go through the whole bloody thing to find out the bit that you're interested in. But it's down here below in nice small writing.

25-34, Unmeasured

It's detracting from what I wanted to find out. That would be a follow-on video as why we charge so much or why does it cost so much to pay water bill, not what's on your water bill.

35-54, Measured

The unmeasured billing page provides helpful information, but the picture is not complete



Unmetered customers

- Once a customer has located the correct page that explains how their unmeasured bill is made up, it is felt to be relatively informative
- Some customers note that the text formatting could be better defined; numerous links can make the page feel overwhelming
 - And one customer expects to see a clear grid/table outlining charges
- The main issue found with this page is that rateable value is not adequately explained
 - Clicking on the link does provide some clarity, but some expect to see a more concrete definition of the calculation

If you don't have a water meter, we calculate your bill using the rateable value of your home. Your bill also includes standing charges.

Here's how your charges are worked out...

Supplying clean water to your home

This charge is for collecting, storing, cleaning and supplying water to your home. To work this out, we multiply our unit cost by each £1 of your home's [rateable value](#).

Taking away and cleaning your wastewater

This charge is for taking away and cleaning all your used water (which we call wastewater) and includes [surface water and highway drainage](#) too. To work this out, we multiply our unit cost by each £1 of your home's [rateable value](#).

Standing charges

Finally, you also pay us a standing charge. This is a fixed annual charge associated with the costs of providing our services, and is shared amongst all our customers.

Why not take a look at our [video](#) which explains how we calculate your bill? We also have an [easy to read guide \(PDF 1,660 KB opens in new window\)](#) on our new bills that we're introducing over the coming weeks.

Could you pay less with a water meter?

...d be paying more than you...
...e value, it's well worth...
...water meter section to help

...y to help. [Find out how we](#)

...at you pay for, take a look...
...h is sent to you once a

What I'm looking for here is a grid, which, actually, they did quite well on the bill, to be fair. There's no house style. If I went on here, it would be nice to see something that reflected the bill.

18-34, Unmeasured

The actual charges vs how the charge is made up are found on different pages



- On one occasion a customer lands on the Household Charging page
- While the table provides useful information on the specific charges per cubic meter, some customers would expect to see more detailed information alongside this
- A number of customer comment that they are not entirely clear on the various aspects of wastewater and whether this applies to them or not – clear definitions of what these charges refer to would be welcome
- One customer is further thrown by *'assumes a 15mm meter has been fitted'* – this creates further doubt about how to interpret these figures

Household charges if you have a water meter

Measured water charges

| Water | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Standing charge | Volumetric charge per m ³ |
| £25.96 | £1.828 |

Assumes a 15mm meter has been fitted.

Measured sewerage charges

| | Standing charge | Foul drainage volumetric charge per m ³ | Surface water drainage fixed charge | Highway drainage fixed charge |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| All services | £5.16 | £1.262 | £70.57 | £33.09 |
| No surface water drainage service | £5.16 | £1.262 | n/a | £33.09 |

There is an expectation that these charges would have clearer definitions on the same page (they are currently in the 'understanding my bill' section)

Information on support for the vulnerable is relatively easily found



- Customers tend to head to the 'Help and Support' menu; the term 'priority services' is well understood by some

Register for Priority Services then, isn't it? I suppose. Yeah. There we are. Register for Priority Services. I'd put my mum's water bill number into there. It doesn't seem to be worded. There we are. I want to register a friend or relative. I would have to call that number. I can't do it online by the look of it.

35-54, Measured

- But another customer finds the menu does not specify clearly what they are looking for

Your eye is looking for some age-related word, it's not there. Priority services possibly? Because it's all your water supply, your waste water. Yeah. It's not obvious, is it? Help with your water supply.

18-34, Measured

Priority Services

Help when you need it most

We can all benefit from a bit of extra support at some stage in our lives. This could be due to age, ill health, disability, mental health problems, financial worries or language barriers.

Priority Services can help you, your family or your friends benefit from additional support from us so we can respond quickly to those particular needs.

If you would like to register for Priority Services or update your details, please:

- fill in our online online form, or
- call us on 0345 072 8000.

Even if you don't need these services yourself, if you know a family member, friend or neighbour who might benefit from a bit of extra support, please let them know about Priority Services. It is completely free to our customers in the North West, and you don't have to be the named bill payer to sign off from Priority Services.

Watch the short video below to hear the different ways we can take your needs into account when we call or visit you, along with other ways we can give you that extra support.

Sharing location

We could even share your Priority Services details with Electricity North West, the distribution network operator for the majority of our region. If you're eligible, all we need is your consent to share and we'll do the rest, and you'll be offered help from your water and electricity providers if there's ever a problem. www.nwac.uk/central/north-west/priority-services-repower-what-how-to-find-out

Not covered by Electricity North West? If you live within Manchester, Wiltshire or in Greater London, your electricity network provider could be 5th Energy Networks. www.5thenergy.com/for-the-priority-services-advice.htm

Our videos below are provided with British Sign Language and subtitles.

Once located below the fold, the range of support available is though to be comprehensive and helpful

Two routes are taken to find out about water meter relocation



Search box

- One customer, upon brief inspection of the menu, resorts to using the **search box**
- This takes them to a 'tile' that answers a different question, but also points to a fuller meter **FAQ**
- Full and detailed information (including an application form) are found in the subsequent list of questions fairly easily
- The information provided is felt to be clear and unambiguous

Several layers of FAQs

- Another customer uses the 'My Account' menu option to click on 'All about water meters'
- They then follow this page to the bottom, past several tiles to 'find more questions'
- They then see another page of 'tiled' meter FAQs
- They then click on 'view all our FAQs' to find a long list of meter questions; 'relocating a meter' is eventually located

I find that, here's your options up here, the larger categories of the website. Then if you can't find what you want, you just go to the next one which is the search. For me, it seems like a good location. Yeah, just that I wouldn't know how to find what I just found without searching really, because it'll probably take a while for me to go through the website.

18-34, Measured

I might save you money on my new meter. That's not really it. Moving home, moving out of your home. The newest thing I'm getting here, the dials on my meter aren't moving. That potentially could be something. Here we go. How do I get my water meter moved to a different location on the FAQs. It's loading up now.

35-54, Measured

Finding information on support for those that may be financially disadvantaged



- Customers can relatively easily find information on what to do if they find themselves in difficulties paying their bill
- The 'difficulty paying your bill' link is easily found in the menu options
 - Although for one customer, this takes them round a number of links before they find information on the schemes available (see page 34)
 - The plain initial text at the top of the page can be a distraction
- One customer initially expects to find this information in 'Help and Support', and then reverts to the 'My account' menu that that they had visited previously

Please take me back to the same page. It's the same page. Here we are. Right. The top is always the same, so you feel like you're going back to the same page, but you're not. If you scroll down, the pictures are different.

35-54, Unmeasured



How we can help with your bill

Support if you're struggling with your bill

SEE OUR SCHEMES



Free Independent Advice

Organisations who can help you out of debt

FREE ADVICE HERE



How to improve your credit score

Simple tips to give you a good credit score

CREDIT SCORE

I would have looked under help and support for that because in my mind, I'm wanting help with something.

18-34, Measured

Customer experience and website evaluation

There are some positive responses to some of the information on the website, but not overwhelmingly so



- Most customers are very happy with the service and any interaction they have with United Utilities
- So they have a positive view of the business as a whole
- And many welcome the fact that information on (for example) help and support for those struggling to pay is clearly set out on the website
- At the same time, there are concerns about the volume of information and how well it is organised in terms of navigation

I think the website's good, its friendly The colours and style and layout is nice. Your bill's really easy to follow, even though you don't necessarily know what you are being charged for.

18-34, Measured

There was maybe one page where potentially after a bit of reading and trying to understand, I would get the information, but yeah, I feel like finding it was a little bit difficult.. I would say if the people who do want to find that information, it's not the easiest website to navigate. There are good top links on the homepage, but I think maybe they just need to re-evaluate what those top links should.

35-54, Measured

Broadly speaking customers feel they have to work quite hard to find the right information



- Feedback on the website overall is broadly consistent:

It's not the easiest to navigate...I think the main thing for me would be to have more links on the home page to the main section... paying for your bills - get those links on the home page.

18-34, Measured

Typically, I would expect a small intro, and then a picture of my bill and it telling me what each bit is, and that could be interactive so you click on it and it gives you the information, so that what's on the website links to what you've got in your hands. At the minute, I'm doing quite a lot of work in terms of finding out what this is.

35-54, Measured

That was great having very limited options to choose at the top, but the plethora of options to choose underneath is: a) bewildering, and b) doesn't seem to link up to that top bar. So I think we just need to think about how people navigate.

35-54, Measured

The information was presented in a clear way. It was the navigation.. that was the issue. I think they just need to find a [consistent] signposting method and a design... There's a difference between a website you have time to get used to and a website that has to give you information quickly.

35-54, Unmeasured

There are a number of 'human factors' that undoubtedly contribute to people's difficulties with the site



'Skimming'

- A number of customers could be seen to 'skim' through text
- One customer even admits to this explicitly
- And for some this is in part due to the volume of text and sometime lack of headings and signposting

I think I want number 16, this is 7. Was it page 16 I wanted? This is it, man. Let's have a look now. Again, this is a problem when you skim. I'm such a skimmer. It's horrendous.

35-54, Unmeasured

'Learned helplessness'

- In some cases, customers are seen to give up searching or trying to understand something that is potentially complex
- We see this frequently in utilities research
- Particularly when it comes to unit charges

If you do have a water meter, volumetric charge per m3 is 1.922. Means absolutely nothing to me.

55+, Measured

'Not knowing what you need'

- 'Understanding your bill' and 'Household Charges' both contain multitudes of information
- When somebody is looking to understand something better, not knowing what they are looking for can hinder them from looking in the right place

I would expect to see a bill replicated on that page. For it then to be interactive, you can click on it and it will say 'you have used 37 cubic meters'.

25-34, Measured

The menu bar can be difficult to navigate and is not intuitively organised for many



My Account

Your bill

Ways to pay
Is your water bill higher than expected?
Our household charges 2020/2021
Difficulty paying your bill?
Understanding your bill

Moving home

Existing customer
New customer?
Moving out of your home
Landlords
Student moving home?

All about water meters

Apply for a water meter
Submit a meter reading
You can save with a water meter
How to find & read meters
Water usage calculator

- Some customers offer constructive criticism of the menus
 - There is concern that the large array of options offered can confuse customers, with some repetition and similar sounding items
 - One customer points out that the way the menu is formatted means that specific information doesn't naturally 'jump out'

I would say in all of these initial drop downs, it's all very wordy. Although it is subset, sets it out into drop-downs, it just appears as a bunch of words. Finding the bit that you want doesn't drive the eye. Just slightly larger font, bolder font, same colour. Then it doesn't drive you to those as being headlines.

35-54, Measured

- Customers are not always able to locate the correct menu item initially
 - Some expect that 'My Account' will be the login page through which they can access their bills
 - While some others click on 'Help & Support' to better understand their bills
- It is not clear to all that the 'main' menu options are clickable
- Some feel the menu options could be more sharply defined, with the sub-options more intuitively organised

Help & Support

Contact us

Other ways to contact us
Popular kaifios
Frequently asked questions
Feedback form

Your water supply

Drinking water quality
Does your tap water look different?
Does your tap water taste or smell different?
Looking after water in your home
How we provide clean water

Your wastewater services

Think before you flush
Think before you pour
Monsters found in freepool sewer
Our wonderful coastline
Sewers and drains explained

Priority Services

Help with your water supply
Translation services
Bogus callers
Password scheme
Register for Priority Services

Cold weather advice

Blank pipes
Frozen pipes

Save water

Water saving tips
Save water in the garden
Order your Save-Well Wash pack
Flow Water
Advice for businesses

Some customers comment that certain text- and link- heavy pages do not encourage them to engage



- One customer was particularly concerned about the density of some of the text on the site

From there to there tells me nothing. You could literally say a quarter of the screen there. You could just say, "Your bill is broken down in two," and then give me those. That's okay. That's obvious, the amount we charge for this, so it depends on whether or not you have water meter.

35-54, Unmeasured

- Another customer highlights the fact that the prevalence of links on certain pages can be distracting; they would prefer not to have to leave the page to find the information they need

Already, I'm looking at blue links here, you've got 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 different reasons to leave that page before you even get to these ones down here. The likelihood is most viewers would never see poor old Gloria, who has gone through the trouble of filming a nice video down there.

35-54, Unmeasured

How we calculate your bill

Some of the terminology we use on our bills - such as rateable value, volumetric charges, cubic metres - can be confusing, so here's a simple explanation of how we calculate your bill for the services you receive from us.

The services you pay for

In simple terms, we charge you for the following services:

- supplying drinking water to your home
- taking away all your dirty water
- taking away rainwater
- a standing charge for essential services such as reading your water meter (if you have one), sending bills and dealing with customer enquiries

Supplying clean water to your home

This charge is for collecting, storing, cleaning and supplying water to your home. To work this out, we multiply our unit cost by each £1 of your home's [rateable value](#).

Taking away and cleaning your wastewater

This charge is for taking away and cleaning all your used water (which we call wastewater) and includes [surface water and highway drainage](#) too. To work this out, we multiply our unit cost by each £1 of your home's [rateable value](#).

Standing charges

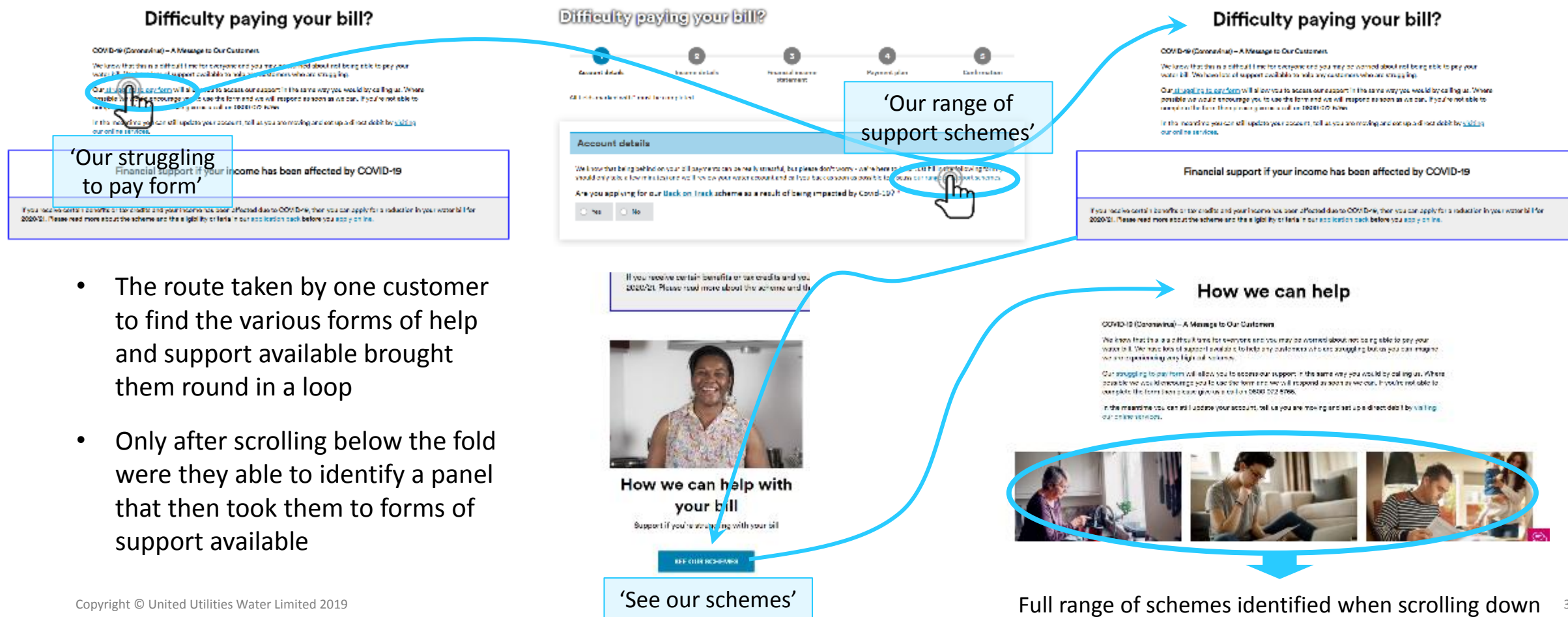
Finally, you also pay us a standing charge. This is a fixed annual charge associated with the costs of providing our services, and is shared amongst all our customers.

Why not take a look at our [video](#) which explains how we calculate your bill? We also have an [easy to read guide \(PDF 1,660 KB opens in new window\)](#) on our new bills that we're introducing over the coming weeks.



Some customers feel that the page headers can hinder them from finding the right information – and the route they take can be circuitous

- Two customers highlighted that often, useful information is hidden 'below the fold' – in the example below, this is all that can be seen on clicking the 'difficulty paying' button (this will obviously vary according to device/browser/screen resolution)



- The route taken by one customer to find the various forms of help and support available brought them round in a loop
- Only after scrolling below the fold were they able to identify a panel that then took them to forms of support available

The search function has mixed results for customers using straightforward search terms

- Two customers made use of the search function to answer queries, with very different results
- One customer was unable to locate information on relocating a water meter through the meter FAQ; he resorted to a search which took him to an answer that wasn't relevant
 - He ultimately found the answer below the fold after clicking on a further link
- One other customer used the search function automatically to find details about her bill and the charges
 - This led her to a long list of links that put her off reading further; all of the searches at the top were focused on businesses and wholesale

I might save you money on my new meter. That's not really it. Moving home, moving out of your home. The newest thing I'm getting here, the dials on my meter aren't moving... How do I get my water meter moved to a different location on the FAQs.

35-54, Measured

The search site, [it must be] the metadata that they are attaching to it.

55+, Measured



Search results for: 'Moving water meter'

It looks like you might be looking for the following:



More search results are below or you can [view all of our FAQs here](#)

Search results for: 'water charges'

Showing items 1 - 10 of 871

Wholesale charges

Description of United Utilities Wholesale charges

Business Charges 2017-2018

Links to business charges 2017-2018 for metered and unmetered customers

What are infrastructure charges? [PDF](#)

Business Charges 2016-2017

Links to business charges 2016-2017 for metered and unmetered customers

Charges for community groups

Details about charges for community groups

New connection charges consultation

Description of new charges and approach

Reactions to the Household Charges page and document

The Household Charges webpage is thought to be helpful, but lacking some key information



- Most find the 'Household Charges' page relatively easily through the top menu
 - Some had already hit on the page through searching for information on their bills (and so without the exercises we undertook, it may have been harder to find)
- Some customers find the tables of charges helpful, though the information can lack certain key pieces of information:
 - The 'average' bill leaves too much potential variance for some
 - Definitions of 'foul water drainage' and other services are not clearly defined (as they are in the 'understanding your bill' page)

Our household charges 2020/2021

Our household charges scheme relates to the period starting from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.

Below is a summary of our tariffs that form part of our [charges scheme for 2020/2021](#) (PDF) [see PDF for a more detailed view](#).

Our average household water bill for 2020/21 is £49.94, a decrease of 5.5 per cent compared to our 2019/20 charges.

Your water bill will be more or less than this amount depending on the services you receive from us and whether you have a water meter or your charges are based on your home's rateable value. Please visit [Understanding your bill](#) to watch a short video which explains how we calculate your charges.

In straightforward terms, our charges for the following services:

- Supplying clean water to your home
- Taking away and cleaning all your dirty water (this is all sewerage services)
- Taking away all the rainwater that falls on your home and the public roads and footpaths
- Standing charges to cover essential services such as making your water meter (if you have one), sending bills and dealing with enquiries.

Please note that charges are shown exclusive of any VAT and are annual, unless stated otherwise.

Household charges if you don't have a water meter

Dimensioned water charges

| Water | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Standing charge | Charge per ERV* |
| £6.00 | £1.00 |

Dimensioned sewerage charges

| | Foul drainage charge per ERV | Surface water drainage charge per ERV | Highway drainage charge per ERV | per |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| All services | £1.00 | £0.40 | £0.20 | £1.70 |
| No surface water drainage service | £1.00 | N/A | £0.20 | £1.20 |
| Surface water drainage and highway drainage only | | | | |

*ERV charges if you have a water meter

In my house, I don't know, is it like sinks? I'm not sure. I don't know how they would distinguish it. I guess sewerage is quite easy, maybe it's just flushing the toilet, basically. Whereas, like things from the sink, probably I would say come under this charge.

18-34, Measured

This one would be normal water usage like sinks and so on, and this would be sewage, toilets, and stuff. Except for this surface water drainage, this makes sense. I don't see, highway drainage. I guess that's not specific to someone's house. Maybe this is equivalent to road tax. It's just something that each household has to pay, maybe. But that seems like quite a lot. I don't know if these are per month, or is it per unit?

35-54, Measured

Those customers initially using the website to answer queries feel that the Charging Document can be overwhelming



- Having spent time seeking out answers to queries on the wider website, there is a sense of information overload for some customers on viewing the Household Charges document
- There is an understanding of why the document must exist
 - But for some it provides a level of detail that should be evident on the billing pages
- All comment that at 57 pages, they are unlikely to resort to looking at this document
- And the knowledge (through viewing the link) that the document opens up a 57 page PDF can serve to deter them

*It would be useful because it covers every [eventuality]. We got the water sure and all of those. We've also got if you're a landlord and you got problems. It covers everything but it **is** 50 pages.*

35-54, Measured

I think it's just a regulatory [document], a legal document which says they have to have all the terms and conditions and explanations of things in one place, if I wanted to go through it... My bill was so much easier, but if I couldn't find it, I would do this.

35-54, Unmeasured



Those seeing the document without reference to the website see it as a comprehensive policy / legal document

- It's broadly accepted that it's **necessary** for UU to collate all relevant charging information into a **single, formal reference source**
- However, given the size of the document, it's unsurprising that customers feel it could potentially be **daunting for the layperson to tackle**
- Additionally, it's felt to contain a lot of **legalese**, which raises questions over who it's aimed at. Suggestions range from UU internal usage to householders and/or landlords for guidance
 - Potentially there is too much for a household customer to engage with though

If I were to describe this document I might say it is the Water Authority's Bible.

Female, 55+, Measured

You need to be fairly literate and due to its length it may appear daunting to some members of the public.

Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

I would describe this document to a friend as the legalese behind your water supply.

Male, 18-34, Measured

As a reference bible for charges, customers see the document as supplementary to more everyday information sources



- Many feel the document would be useful for gaining a **more detailed understanding** on charges if they were **unable to find the right information on the website**
- For example, if they had a **complaint or dispute** they needed to resolve, they feel the document would provide the relevant info to **reassure them of their rights**
- Otherwise, they are **unlikely to seek out the document** under 'normal' circumstances as they would expect the **website / FAQs section** to have the vast majority of necessary information
- Customers feel the breadth of the document shows that UU is **transparent and fair**, but that it needs **revising if the goal is to have more customers referring to it**

I'd probably expect to find the information I needed in a much shorter version. Maybe if I had some sort of dispute over my charges I'd check it.

Female, 55+, Unmeasured

The document tells me that UU are very transparent in their dealings with the public.

Female, 55+, Measured

The language used throughout would put off or stop most people from reading more than a few pages.

Male, 55+, Unmeasured

The level of detail included in the contents page is somewhat polarising, depending on customer need



| HOUSEHOLD CHARGES SCHEME 2020/2021 | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Contents | |
| 1. | Introduction 7 |
| 1.1 | Charges scheme 7 |
| 1.2 | Amount of charges 8 |
| 1.3 | Billing period 8 |
| 1.4 | Value Added Tax (VAT) 8 |
| 2. | General 9 |
| 2.1 | Liability for charges 9 |
| 2.2 | Timing of payment 10 |
| 2.3 | Priority services 11 |
| 2.4 | Discount for direct debit payers 11 |
| 2.5 | Discount for paying water services charges via a registered social housing landlord or local authority 12 |
| 2.5 | Help with lowering your bill 12 |
| 2.6.1 | Watersure 12 |
| 2.6.2 | Help to pay scheme 13 |
| 2.6.3 | Support tariff (also known as Back on Track) 14 |
| 2.6.4 | Application 14 |
| 2.6.5 | Evidence of eligibility 14 |
| 2.6.6 | Changes in eligibility and renewal of application 15 |
| 2.7 | Billing adjustments 15 |
| 2.8 | Group billing arrangements 15 |
| 2.9 | Owners allowance 15 |
| 3. | Water supply charges 16 |
| 3.1 | Liability for charges 16 |
| 3.2 | Unmeasured water supply charges 16 |
| 3.2.1 | Basis of charge 16 |
| 3.2.2 | Permanent disconnection 16 |
| 3.2.3 | Temporary disconnection 16 |
| 3.2.4 | Reconnection following disconnection for non-compliance with the Fittings Regulations 16 |
| 3.2.5 | Animal troughs 17 |
| 3.3 | Measured water supply charges 17 |
| 3.3.1 | Basis of measured charges 17 |
| 3.3.2 | Water meter installation 17 |
| 3.3.3 | Water meter reading 17 |
| 3.3.4 | Water meter testing 18 |
| 3.3.5 | Change in water meter position 19 |
| 3.3.6 | Access to the water meter 20 |
| 3.3.7 | Responsibility for metered charges 20 |
| 3.3.8 | Leakage allowances 20 |
| 3.3.9 | Standard measured tariff 21 |
| 3.3.10 | Charging for water used for fire-fighting purposes 21 |
| 3.3.11 | Replacement of service pipe 21 |

Household charges scheme 2020/2021
Page 4 of 57

- Overall, customers acknowledge that the contents page is **detailed and comprehensive**, which is viewed **positively by some**
- Conversely, others feel that the contents page in its current format can be **overwhelming** and **difficult to find the relevant page(s)** due to the very **densely packed text**
- Some customers noticed that the contents page contains **clickable links** to ease navigation throughout the document, but for many it **was not immediately obvious**

It is extremely comprehensive and is divided into relevant sections so it is easy to head right to the bit you are looking for.

Female, 18-34, Unmeasured

The contents page alone makes it look like a long task to read the entire thing and also might be a few minutes to find the right section in the contents.

Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

There is a mixed response from customers to the tone and language of the document



While the document is felt to contain a lot of 'legalese', for the most part customers think it's **easy to understand**

...although some feel that the language used could be **punchier**

...so, while the language is broadly acceptable, there's a sense that **the way its written works against it**

The language used is not too technical and therefore very easy to understand. I think it would be classed as simple but clear.

Female, 35-54, Unmeasured

It just needs to be simplified so the normal customer can read it and understand it.

Male, 55+, Unmeasured

While the language does make things clear it doesn't make you want to read more than is necessary.

Female, 55+, Unmeasured

It is very clear and easy to follow it doesn't have many technical words that I wouldn't understand.

Female, 18-34, Measured

I did not find it easy to read or what exactly was meant on each page.

Female, 35-54, Measured

There really is a need for two versions of this document. A full blown legal document and something that a regular customer can make sense of.

Male, 55+, Measured

Use of the document in answering specific queries

More detailed comprehension of the document was tested through the use of suggested queries



- Customers were split into groups; each group of approximately five customers each were asked to resolve the following query through the use of the Household Charging document. These customers had not spent time on the website prior to viewing the document
 - **A1)** – *How are your water charges calculated if you do not have a water meter? What are the charges made up of and what determines the amount you pay?*
 - **A2)** – *How are your water charges calculated if you have a meter? What are the charges made up of and what determines the amount you pay? What would be the options open to you if you did not think your meter was giving you an accurate picture of your consumption?*
 - **B)** – *What help is there if you required additional support due to age, ill health or disability? What are some of the different types of services available?*
 - **C)** – *What would you need to do if you were carrying out some home improvements and needed to move your water meter to a new location? What are the options open to you i.e. who is able to relocate the meter and what are the stages involved?*
 - **D)** – *What support is available if you were struggling to pay your water bill? What are the different conditions under which you would be eligible for help?*

All found the section on unmeasured charges with relative ease



- All customers are able to immediately locate the correct section for unmeasured charges in the contents page
- The basic structure of the charges is well understood in principle from page 16:
 - Standing charge is a well understood term (though it is noted that the makeup of this charge is not described)
 - A fixed charge based on charging value
- **However:** for many, the basis of the charging value is not clear, and can take some additional research to better understand this
 - Some check the 'definitions' section on page 53 for more information

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|----|
| 3. | Water supply charges..... | 16 |
| 3.1 | Liability for charges | 16 |
| 3.2 | Unmeasured water supply charges | 16 |

Charges for an unmeasured water supply for domestic purposes are made up of two parts:

- a standing charge; and
- a fixed charge per £ of the charging value of the premises.

| Standing charge per year | Charge per £CV |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| £65.06 | £1.078 |

If there is no charging value (CV) or we consider the charging value is no longer relevant, we will either require a water meter to be installed or apply an assessed charge.

Go to page 16. First question is how is the CV calculated - can't see that information. Whipped down to glossary on page 53 - further explanation of the what the CV is but no info on how this is calculated.

Customers have to work quite hard to understand how Charging Value is calculated, and there is no *complete* answer evident



- While some customers were already aware that the unmeasured charge was based on Rateable Value of their premises, there is some back and forth through the document to understand it better
 - The unmeasured charge section on page 16 does not offer any signposting as to what Charging Value is based on (Rateable Value is only explicitly linked to it in 'Definitions' and on the website): <https://www.unitedutilities.com/my-account/your-bill/rateable-value-explained/>)
- Some customers struggle with the £CV notation and one customer calls for an example bill showing working
 - £CV is not an intuitive symbol for many, particularly when reference values are not presented

Charging value – the rateable value for the premises or a charge assessed by us for charging purposes. Also referred to as CV.

Rateable value – the value of premises shown in the official valuation list (for the purposes of the General Rate Act 1967) on 31 March 1990. Also referred to as RV.

[Not clear what] charging value is... I believe it is based on the rateable value of the property but [it] needs more information on the charging value and how it is calculated.

16-34, Unmeasured

The definitions page describes the CV as a rateable value for the premises, but I can't see anywhere that tells you how this charge is worked out or what the actual amount is.

55+, Unmeasured

| |
|-----------------------|
| Charge per £CV |
| £1.078 |

Customers found the information they were looking for on metered charges but were redirected at least once in doing so



The Query Journey

- Customers started by scrolling through the contents section on Water supply charges, then went to page 17 before being directed from here to page 21
- Although the information was found having to be redirected twice provided some frustration

Why not make contents simpler by having these as the two sub categories? Contents direct me to 3.3 page 17... from which to answer your query, I then am redirected to standard measured tariff (see 3.3.9) Measured, 35-54

The Contents Page

| | | |
|--------|--|----|
| 3. | Water supply charges..... | 16 |
| 3.1 | Liability for charges..... | 16 |
| 3.2 | Unmeasured water supply charges..... | 16 |
| 3.2.1 | Basis of charge..... | 16 |
| 3.2.2 | Permanent disconnection..... | 16 |
| 3.2.3 | Temporary disconnection..... | 16 |
| 3.2.4 | Reconnection following disconnection for non-compliance with the Fittings Regulations..... | 16 |
| 3.2.5 | Animal troughs..... | 17 |
| 3.3 | Measured water supply charges..... | 17 |
| 3.3.1 | Basis of measured charges..... | 17 |
| 3.3.2 | Water meter installation..... | 17 |
| 3.3.3 | Water meter reading..... | 17 |
| 3.3.4 | Water meter testing..... | 18 |
| 3.3.5 | Change in water meter position..... | 19 |
| 3.3.6 | Access to the water meter..... | 20 |
| 3.3.7 | Responsibility for metered charges..... | 20 |
| 3.3.8 | Leakage allowances..... | 20 |
| 3.3.9 | Standard measured tariff..... | 21 |
| 3.3.10 | Charging for water used for fire-fighting purposes..... | 21 |
| 3.3.11 | Replacement of service pipe..... | 21 |

Here, the contents page could be altered to split up unmeasured charges and measured charges. While improved labelling on measured charges could help customers go exactly where they want to go

The redirection

3.3.1 Basis of measured charges

Measured water charges Water for domestic purposes, supplied through a water meter is charged on our standard measured tariff (see 3.3.9).

The information on the standard measured tariff was well understood aside from some confusion around waste water charges



Finding the information

- Information on a standard measured tariff was well understood as it was well split out into standing charge and volumetric charge
- One point of contention was understanding around 'waste water charges'. As the measurement, here only covers water for domestic purposes it begs the question how to find out information on waste water charges

Standard measured tariff

Standard measured water charges

3.3.9 Standard measured tariff

The charges for water for domestic purposes are made up of two parts:

- a charge per cubic metre of water used; and
- a standing charge for the water meter.

| Standing charge per year | Volumetric charge per m ³ |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| £25.96 | £1.828 |

“This doesn't include waste water charges if i just read the above i would be confused when my bill came in and I see waste water charges” **Measured**



A link to information around waste water charges could be provided after this section on the standard measured tariff

By contrast, finding information specifically on whether the water meter is giving an accurate picture was easier for customers



Information on water meter testing was thought to be easy to find as it was clearly labelled inside the contents page

Though the information on Water meter testing is quite long winded, it is well understood and customers know they are in the right place

| | | |
|--------|--|----|
| 3. | Water supply charges..... | 16 |
| 3.1 | Liability for charges..... | 16 |
| 3.2 | Unmeasured water supply charges..... | 16 |
| 3.2.1 | Basis of charge..... | 16 |
| 3.2.2 | Permanent disconnection..... | 16 |
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Accuracy of meters

3.3.4 Water meter testing

You can ask us to test the water meter in accordance with regulation 6 of the Meters Regulations, using the application form available on our website. The water meter will always be removed from the premises for testing, to ensure accuracy. A charge for the test of **£70.00** (plus VAT at the standard rate) is payable by you if it shows that the accuracy of the water meter falls within the prescribed limits of error. No charge is payable if the meter accuracy is outside the prescribed limits of error.

If the test shows the water meter is registering incorrectly, we will adjust your charges in accordance with regulations 8 & 9 of the Meters Regulations. Where the water meter has registered less than the volume of water supplied to the house the adjustment is limited to six months before the last meter reading that brought the matter to our attention.

it was very quick and east to find what to do if i was unsure my meter was giving an accurate picture.3.3.4 Water meter testing was easy to find on contents page and click on

Unknown, Measured

Several examples of additional support for those who need it were identified by customers



- The Priority Services scheme was already familiar to some, with one customer already registered due to their hearing impairment but admitted they were unsure how they'd be helped or what they would be prioritised for
- Other services mentioned by customers included:
 - WaterSure
 - Meter repositioning for physically disabled customers
 - Help to pay scheme for customers on Pension Credit
 - Payment break for customers who are hospitalised or placed in residential care

2.3 Priority services

Priority services is a free service designed to help customers who may need additional help and support and where we may need to respond differently to meet customer needs.

2.6.1 WaterSure

WaterSure is a scheme intended to help customers with a water meter or who pay an assessed charge (see 3.5.5) that have low income and use higher than average amounts of water due to a large family or medical conditions.

Our scheme allows eligible customers to pay a charge based on our average annual household charges.

I think the Priority Services facility is broad enough to accommodate all kinds of disability, elderly, frail, immobile, but I don't actually know how I would be "helped" or have priority.

Female, 55+, Measured

The nominee schemes where you can register others to act on your behalf, is good if you struggle reading things like I do.

Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

Information on meter relocation was relatively easy to find



- All customers were able to find information on meter relocation relatively easily
- Most were able to locate the correct section ('Change in water meter location' 3.3.5) via the contents page
- One customer used the search function to look up 'relocation' and found the section immediately
- It was clear to all that depending upon the location and destination of the meter, different cost options are available
 - Including the possibility for a plumber to undertake the work, inspected by UU
- One other customer headed to the 'alterations to premises' section (3.4.4) by mistake and found it frustrating to keep scrolling back up to the contents index

3.3.5 Change in water meter position

We will allow you to relocate a water meter from one internal location to another internal location, provided that the work meets our requirements and it is inspected by us. A charge is payable for the inspection.

If you have a physical disability and are registered for our Priority Services, we will not charge for relocating a water meter from an external location to an internal one but all other meter location requests will be charged as set out in the following table:

Because I am a disabled customer, if I was moving it from outside to inside, there would be no charge and UU would do the work for me. If I was relocating it internally, I could have a plumber do it for me or could pay for UU to do it for me.

Female, 35-54+, Measured

I should have seen the item in the contents page, but didn't spot at first. Having to scroll back to the contents page each time I guessed wrong was frustrating. Perhaps I've still missed a shortcut..

Male, 55+, Unmeasured

Customers could find details of help for those struggling to pay, but suggest UU could do more to encourage them to seek help



- All customers identified Section 2.6 'Help with lowering your bill' as a starting point for customers who may be struggling to pay their bill, citing the following examples:
 - Had been made redundant
 - Were in debt
 - Unable to pay full amounts
- The supportive tone is praised, but there is a sense that some customers won't realise the onus is on them to let UU know of their circumstances. Therefore, it's suggested that the document could do more to encourage struggling customers to seek help before bills build up too much

2.6 Help with lowering your bill

We operate three schemes intended to help our customers who are having difficulty paying their water services charges.

If you or a person living with you ("the qualifying person") meet the eligibility criteria and conditions detailed on our website you may be eligible for assistance with your charges. Further details, including full eligibility criteria can be found at:

unitedutilities.com/difficulty-paying-bill

2.6.3 Support tariff (also known as Back on Track)

The **Support tariff** is a scheme designed by us to help customers on low income who are struggling to pay their water services charges. The scheme is available to customers who are in arrears with their water services charges, and in receipt of certain eligible benefits.

Full details of the scheme and eligibility criteria can be found at:

unitedutilities.com/difficulty-paying-bill

The tone is supportive but maybe more use of 'please get in touch' rather than thinking the bill will go away.

Female, 35-54, Unmeasured

The main thing I learnt was that there are a number of possibilities and that if you do not let UU know your circumstances nothing can be done.

Female, 55+, Unmeasured

Overall evaluation

Some accept the document for it's intended purpose, while others feel it needs to work harder in order to be accessible for all



I'd view this as a reference document, particularly as it's easy to find the section you need by linking from the contents. So wouldn't expect it to meet the criteria I'd have for a document that I was planning to read completely, and on that basis I feel it's well-designed.

Female, 55+ , Unmeasured

The guide is comprehensive enough to cover any queries I may have regarding my water charges, but I think this document is too cumbersome and unwieldy for domestic use



Male, 35-54 , Measured

For most customers, as they see it as an information pack, the design and layout is acceptable



As a reference document, the **design works well and is consistent throughout**. The use of numbered sections and subsections **helps to break up the text**, and guide the reader's attention

Furthermore, the **Italics on the left hand side of the page help with signposting**, and allows the reader to **navigate on the page easily**

The use of **relevant tables** works well and is **complementary to the text**. They also appreciate the lack of imagery, and they feel this would detract from the key information

3.5 Optional water metering

3.5.1 Application for a free water meter installation

Application for a free water meter installation If you receive an unmeasured water supply from us you may apply to be charged by volume and have a water meter installed free of charge. You can request a free water meter by applying via our website, by telephoning us or by completing and returning our application form.

3. WATER SUPPLY CHARGES

3.1 Liability for charges

Liability for water supply charges You are liable for charges if premises are occupied or there is evidence of consumption, or you benefit from a supply of water made available to you.

Charges for an unmeasured water supply for domestic purposes are made up of two parts:

- a standing charge; and
- a fixed charge per £ of the charging value of the premises.

| Standing charge per year | Charge per £CV |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| £65.06 | £1.078 |

I'm a big fan of sections and subsections, and when this is implanted via paragraph indentation levels as well as numbers. E.g. section 3.5.1 and so on.

- Female, 18-34, Unmeasured

I like the labels in italics in the left column as they break the longer sections up and can be flicked through quickly without needing to read all the text.

- Female, 55+, Unmeasured

I liked how the charges were set out in tables, which is definitely the clearest way to provide this information.... I don't think more images would be needed

- Female, 18-34, Unmeasured

However they do feel more could be done to make it more user friendly and something they would 'want to engage with'



Practical solutions

- **More use of colour** as a tool to differentiate sections, and draw the reader in on key information
- **Highlighting the clickable regions** would ensure the reader is aware of the functionality, and improve navigation around the document
- **Improve spacing** particularly around the contents table, by utilising white space, which often is deemed too dense

A greater use of colour to differentiate between topics would be helpful. There is a lot of text so any way to break this up to make it less overwhelming would be preferable.

Female, 18-34, Measured

Content solutions

- **Moving the charges table to the front of the document** as this is believed to be a key query for members; an overview of the different forms of charging would be welcome
- Providing **examples or case studies** will better allow the reader to contextualise the information in relation to themselves
- Ensure **key definitions and information** is provided at the beginning of each section, for example definition of the three charging methods and their relation to each other.

I thought that the charges section should have been at the start of the document. I feel like it is hidden away at the back.

Female, 18-34, Unmeasured

Several specific changes to the tone and language were suggested by customers



RV vs CV not adequately explained and felt to be **used interchangeably**, so some left feeling **confused about meaning of their charges**



Information about how the CV is calculated is the crucial information I felt was left out
Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

Similarly, “measured” and “metered” appear to be **used inconsistently**, causing **confusion** among customers



Using a mix of unmeasured and metered might cause some confusion – perhaps metered and un-metered or measured and unmeasured would be better?

Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

Assessed Household Charge **not fully understood** and could **benefit from signposting** as it not something many are familiar with



I would like to see clearer information regarding Charging value and how you come up with an Assessed charge.

Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

Some proposed including a **glossary**, indicating they are looking specifically for this terminology rather than the current ‘definitions’ section



Some of the terms/acronyms may need to be explained in a glossary for those not familiar with the industry terminology.

Male, 55+, Measured

Proposed improvements

The proposed content page is felt to resolve issues raised previously, due to the simplified approach and layout



Contents

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| 2. How we can help | 7 |
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Water for the North West

Household charges scheme 2021/2022
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- The new layout feels **customer facing, easy to navigate and streamlined**, while still providing an **acceptable level of detail**.
- The **language is deemed customer friendly**, the layout feels less busy and more **digestible**, with members assuming the **headers will still be clickable (this should be better highlighted)**
- However, some feel it would be useful to have a **summary / mini contents page at the beginning of each section** in order to ensure you're in the right section.

Less is more. Each of the headings is clear and I could probably find what I'm looking for a lot quicker with a reduced number of headings.

Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

This just feels a lot more user friendly and like this is a document for customers to use not just internal legalise.

Female, 35-54, Measured

Further areas for improvement include:

- Signposting or further distinguishing of the clickable areas is needed to ensure use.
- Further clarity as to what is included in 'Other services' and 'other charging information' sections.

While members appreciate and see value in the inclusion of a FAQ page, they would also expect this to be available on the website



- The layout of the FAQ is appealing to members, due to the **grid approach**, use of **colour and breaks**.
- The use of questions; rather than statements / titles, feels more **customer facing**, with members easily able to gauge the topic **relevance** to their query.
- As the **website** is the first point of contact for queries, most feel the FAQ is most suited to the website, with a **drop-down style** approach for greater detail

I do think this would be very useful on the website and could link to the document for further reference.

Female, 35-54, Measured

None of the images seem to relate to questions being asked alongside them. Either use relevant images or none at all.

Male, 55+, Unmeasured

Further areas for improvement include:

- Ensure links to relevant pages of the guide are included for each FAQ
- Ensure images are relevant to the topic or remove, as members find this detracts from the topic matter

Thinking about the revised page layout, members feel the new format addresses a number of their previous concerns



- Members are easily able to see the improvements to the proposed page. The **use of shading** helps to draw attention to key information, navigate around the page and also distinguish topic matters.
- The language and reduction in text / subclause numbers feels **more customer centric**, and is **easily digestible**
- The inclusion of more technical or clarification points feels better suited to the **footer**, allowing the main text to be as **clear and punchier**

While members would appreciate images being used in the document, they would need to be relevant and aid in understanding of the text, rather than just for illustrative purposes.

Members are also conscious that the inclusion of more images would add to the length of the document, and decrease the speed in which they're able to find key information

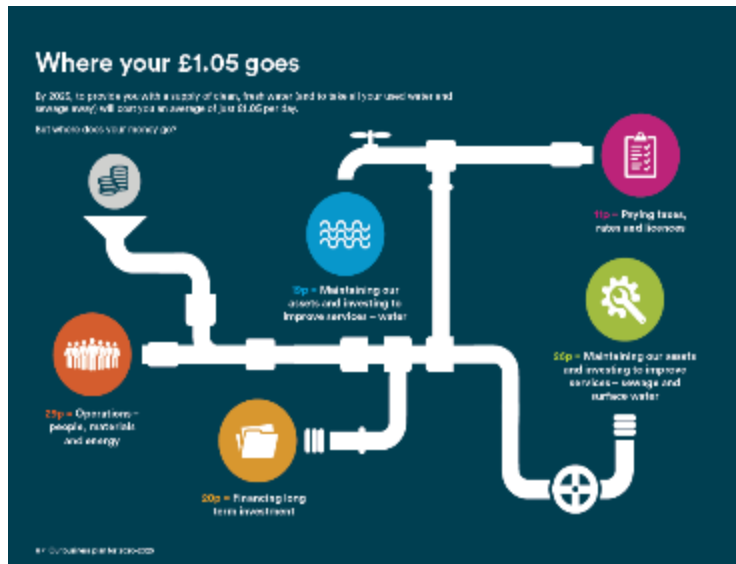
I much prefer the new design, having the section headings highlighted helps you to focus, and are easier on the eye as they break up the text.

Female, 16-34, Unmeasured

I also like the use of numbered notes at the bottom of the page to give more detail/technical information.

Female, 55+, Measured

The infographic works well to highlight where customers' money goes, building brand trust and transparency



- The information included in the infographic feels interesting and relevant to the consumer. For many it's something they want to see, and feels new to both UU and other billing companies
- The layout and design is attractive and eye catching, with members finding it clear, easy to understand and digestible
- Some believe infographics of this nature would be most suited to the website and/ or their bills, as the message could get lost in the guide which is already deemed to be quite long

It helps to build a better, more open relationship between customer and business if done properly.
Male, 35-54, Unmeasured

A good illustration of what UU does and how much it all costs, which is something I don't see from most of the bills I get.
Female, 55+, Unmeasured

Further areas for improvement include:

- Ensure that it is clear that the breakdown relates to an 'average' bill statement
- Consider enhancing the detail e.g. 'financing long term investment' to provide a better understanding of what this comprises of
- Some would like to see further information on what proportion is paid to shareholders

Executive overview

Executive overview (1)

- Many customers are **satisfied with the bills** they receive from United Utilities and there are only occasional queries that arise when a bill amount may not be what they are expecting
- Customers are not frequent users of the UU website, though they may refer to it if they have high level or non-urgent queries about a particular issue
- As an entry point for queries, the website **performs well in some areas and less well in others:**
 - Customers are able to relatively easily find responses to well defined queries such as ‘what financial support is available’ or ‘how to relocate a meter’; at the same time, some have to search through a **number of levels of links** to reach this information
 - Comprehensive information on how bills are calculated are more problematic; some customers admit that there is useful information and explanation in places, but the **information can be fractured and spread around different site locations**
 - Customers are generally **not keen to watch videos** on these topics, and it is noted that the explanation of how bills are structured, and the actual monetary charges themselves, **appear on different pages**

Executive overview (2)

- Customers either implicitly or explicitly highlight a number of areas in which the website can **hinder them from finding and engaging with information**
 - The menu bar is felt to have **too many options**, and customers have different expectations of what 'My Account' and 'Help & Support' might contain
 - There is a lot of **plain text** at the top of webpages with **multiple links**; often FAQ material or other important information is found 'below the fold', and so is not always easily located
 - In some cases, customers take **circuitous routes** to find the information across multiple pages
 - The **search function** works for some, but does not always deliver the right kind of outputs
- There are calls to ensure the **website works harder** in allowing customers to easily find answers to queries

Executive overview (3)

- Overall, the charging document is thought to be a **useful resource**, although it is not seen as being particularly aimed at the **typical domestic customer**; it is not the intuitive point of entry for looking up information on billing, and customers do not locate it easily
- Most customers would expect and want to find responses to typical queries on the **UU website** rather than having to resort to using the document
 - There are suggestions that it may be more **suitable as a reference document** for UU customer service staff, or potentially landlords or property developers; in some cases, for UU customers that have some form of dispute
 - This is in part down to the perceived **complex nature** of some of the contents, and the overall 'density' and design of the document
- That said, most customers are relatively **easily able to solve queries** about their water supply and related issues by using the document
 - Though customers who sought to clarify the basis of unmeasured charges found that the document gave an incomplete picture

Executive overview (4)

- In its current form, the document is **not something that customers feel they would particularly wish to engage with**; there's an expectation that most queries could be solved via the website
 - While some feel it does its intended job reasonably well, others think it could work harder
- There is a particular appetite to provide:
 - **Improved visuals and design**, with a greater use of colour / shading to break up sections / text
 - **More intuitive navigation**, including highlighting the clickable links and providing a 'return to index' button
 - **Key summaries** up front in simpler language that can subsequently direct people to the detail
- The **proposed changes play out well for most**, and reflect the changes that customers had spontaneously suggested
- The **infographic bill breakdown is well received** (with some suggestions for enhancement); most would prefer to see this on their bill and on the website, rather than in the charging document

A number of changes could potentially benefit the document to help customers engage with it more closely

Clearer definition of sections

Breaking up sections into different shaded blocks, with spacing, will help customers navigate and locate individual sections more easily than with the currently dense plain black and white formatting

Greater use of colour

Many customers feel that the lack of colour in the document can put people off – the bill is provided as an example of a UU document that draws the eye and that customers find engaging

A streamlined contents page

Although not unanimous, many customer find that a more stripped back contents page would be desirable; in its current extended form it can be off-putting

Clearly signposted clickable links

Customers would like to be able to navigate more easily throughout the document with clickable links; these should be clearly signposted as such

An upfront summary of charging models

A short summary of the information contained in the document and the three charging models would be welcome, before customers engage with the fuller details

A streamlined FAQ section

There is a clear appetite for an FAQ section; some feel this should be included in the document, and there is a considerable appetite for a 'collapsible' FAQ on the website

The WaterTalk panel

- Water Talk is an online community designed to reflect the views of those in the North West who have access to the internet (circa 90% of the population)
- Customer panels typically provide a deeper level of engagement with customers than ad-hoc pieces of research
- It provides rapid research access to UU customers
 - This can provide fast and cost effective feedback on a wide range of issues
- Where appropriate, work is supported with other methodologies and samples to represent those not present on WaterTalk
- Over 7,000 UU customers are on the panel:
 - 2,600 have taken part in a research activity in the last 6 months

To find out more about using the WaterTalk panel to meet your business needs, please contact **Shy Sharma**:



Shy Sharma

Customer Insight and Exploration Manager

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