



Answering
tomorrow's
challenges
today

United Utilities SROI survey: Headline survey findings February 2023



Survey background

This survey was designed by Ecorys as part of a Social Return on Investment Study (SROI) commissioned by United Utilities.

The survey captures information on how support offered by four United Utilities schemes has impacted on individual beneficiaries and their families. The survey ran between November 2022 and January 2023.

A total of 572 individuals' responses to the survey were received. Of these 572 responses:

- 378 (66%) were for the Priority Services scheme
- 138 (24%) were for the Back on Track tariff
- 32 (6%) were for the Payment Matching scheme
- 24 (4%) were for the Help to Pay tariff

This slide pack presents headline findings broken down by scheme. For the majority of questions, respondents could select more than one response. As such, values presented in tables and charts for each scheme do not sum to 100%.

Results for the Priority Services scheme often differ to those of the other three schemes. Where this applies, findings are broken down by scheme. This difference is likely observed as half of the respondents on the Priority Services scheme applied to the scheme for purely non-financial reasons, such as being disabled. In comparison, across the other three schemes, 4% or less of respondents applied for purely non-financial reasons.

Ofwat standards for high quality research

In 'PR24 and beyond: Customer engagement policy – a position paper' (Feb 2022), Ofwat outlined their expectations of water company research. These expectations, along with how they were taken into account for this SROI study, are summarised below:

Useful and contextualised: The aims of the research, why it has been undertaken, what it will contribute to and how, were outlined by United Utilities in the research tender. The final report will contextualise the findings and explain how findings will be used.

Neutrally designed: The potential for bias was considered at every stage of the project, including set up, question wording and ordering, and the use of quotes and data. The research is being undertaken by an independent research consultancy.

Fit for purpose: SROI is a methodology widely recognised in the field of economic evaluation. The sample was taken from United Utilities customer lists to ensure that the survey was only completed by those with experiences of the support. The survey was piloted before being launched to ensure participants fully understood the questions, and options of 'don't know' and 'prefer not to answer' were included in the survey questions. During the interviews, participants were given opportunities to ask questions and clarify any uncertainties. Various methods for the survey were undertaken, including options for online and telephone to ensure that the method was accessible as possible.

Inclusive: The research focuses on four support schemes offered by United Utilities. A representative samples of customers on these scheme who noted that they were happy to take part in research were invited to the respond to the survey and take part in the follow up interviews. The survey was conducted online, telephone, and via computer-assisted telephone interviewing, depending on the respondent's preference. Similarly, interviews were conducted either online or by telephone.

Continual: The insight gathered by the SROI will provide evidence for Price Review 2024 report to Ofwat, and will also inform United Utilities' business plans and long-term delivery strategies.

Independently assured: The research is being led by Ecorys, an independent consultancy. United Utilities collaborated with Your Voice, the Independent Challenge Group, who reviewed all research materials and provided a check and challenge approach on the method and findings.

Shared in full with others: Research findings will be published in a final report at the end of the project, including information on the methodology, thereby adding to the shared knowledge base. The full final report and research materials will be shared on the United Utilities' research library webpage.

Ethical: The research was conducted in line with the ethical standards of both the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and the Government Social Research ethical protocols.



/

Reasons customers joined a scheme

Reasons for application

Reason for application	Back on Track Tariff	Help To Pay Tariff	Payment Matching Scheme	Priority Services
Couldn't afford water bill/debt	88%	42%	91%	18%
Couldn't afford other essential bills/debts	43%	33%	34%	15%
Couldn't afford rent/mortgage payments/debts	20%	8%	19%	4%
Couldn't afford credit card, bank/overdraft charges, bank/payday lender loan repayments/debts	20%	17%	9%	6%
Couldn't afford essential household items	22%	25%	16%	9%
Needed advice/help on managing money/debt	10%	4%	9%	5%
Vulnerable customer (e.g. disabled, elderly)	1%	4%	0%	48%
Other	1%	4%	0%	6%
Don't know / Prefer not to say	6%	17%	0%	18%

- The majority of customers on the **Payment Matching scheme** and the **Back on Track tariff** applied because they could not afford to pay their water bill/debt, at 91% and 88% respectively.
- This was also a common reason for applying among customers on the **Help to Pay tariff**, at 42%.
- However, just 18% of those on the **Priority Services scheme** applied for this reason.
- The most common reason for applying to the **Priority Services scheme** was that the individual or another member of the household were consider vulnerable, due to either ill health, disability, and/or being elderly (48%).

Unsurprisingly, both COVID-19 and the current cost of living crisis have impacted on customers ability to pay their water bill or debt

COVID-19

- Almost two-thirds of those on the **Payment Matching scheme** (66%) and **the Back on Track tariff** (60%), noted that COVID-19 had impacted on their ability to pay their water bill or water debt.
- This percentage was significantly lower for customers on the **Help to Pay tariff** (25%) and **Priority Services** (17%).
- Reasons for this impact varied, with 54% citing it was due to redundancy or reduced household earnings, 53% to more time spent at home during lockdowns leading to increased water use, and 41% to other debts needing to be paid.

Cost of living crisis


- The cost of living crisis was reported to be having a larger effect on respondents ability to pay than COVID-19, with over seven in ten of those on the **Payment Matching scheme** (84%), **Back on Track tariff** (80%), and **Help to Pay** (71%) noting that this crisis had impacted on their ability to pay their water bill or water debt.
- Again, this percentage was significantly lower for those on the **Priority Services scheme**, at 40%.
- Despite the difficulty in paying for their water, less than one in five (17%) noted that this arose due to an increase in their water bill. Instead, the key reason was a rise in the price of other goods and services (e.g, food, electricity bills), at 89%. Around one-third stated it was due to wages not rising to match the increase in prices (36%), and to other debts needing to be paid (30%).

Areas of customers lives affected by their concerns about money

Before applying to one of the schemes, concerns about money had impact on key areas of **customers lives and their partner's or family's life**. Across all schemes, mental health was the area most affected.

Own life				
Area affected	Back on Track Tariff	Help To Pay Tariff	Payment Matching Scheme	Priority Services
Mental health	93%	71%	91%	67%
Healthy eating	80%	71%	78%	54%
Physical health	75%	63%	66%	50%
Relationships with family or partner	62%	29%	59%	35%
Relationships with friends	57%	21%	50%	30%
Housing situation	57%	42%	53%	30%
Job or employment status	54%	25%	53%	22%

Partner's and/or family's life				
Area affected	Back on Track Tariff	Help To Pay Tariff	Payment Matching Scheme	Priority Services
Mental health	70%	67%	75%	49%
Healthy eating	60%	63%	63%	38%
Physical health	57%	67%	56%	37%
Relationships with family or partner	49%	25%	50%	30%
Relationships with friends	47%	25%	47%	25%
Housing situation	50%	33%	53%	25%
Job or employment status	43%	13%	41%	19%



**Changes seen by
customers since joining a
scheme**

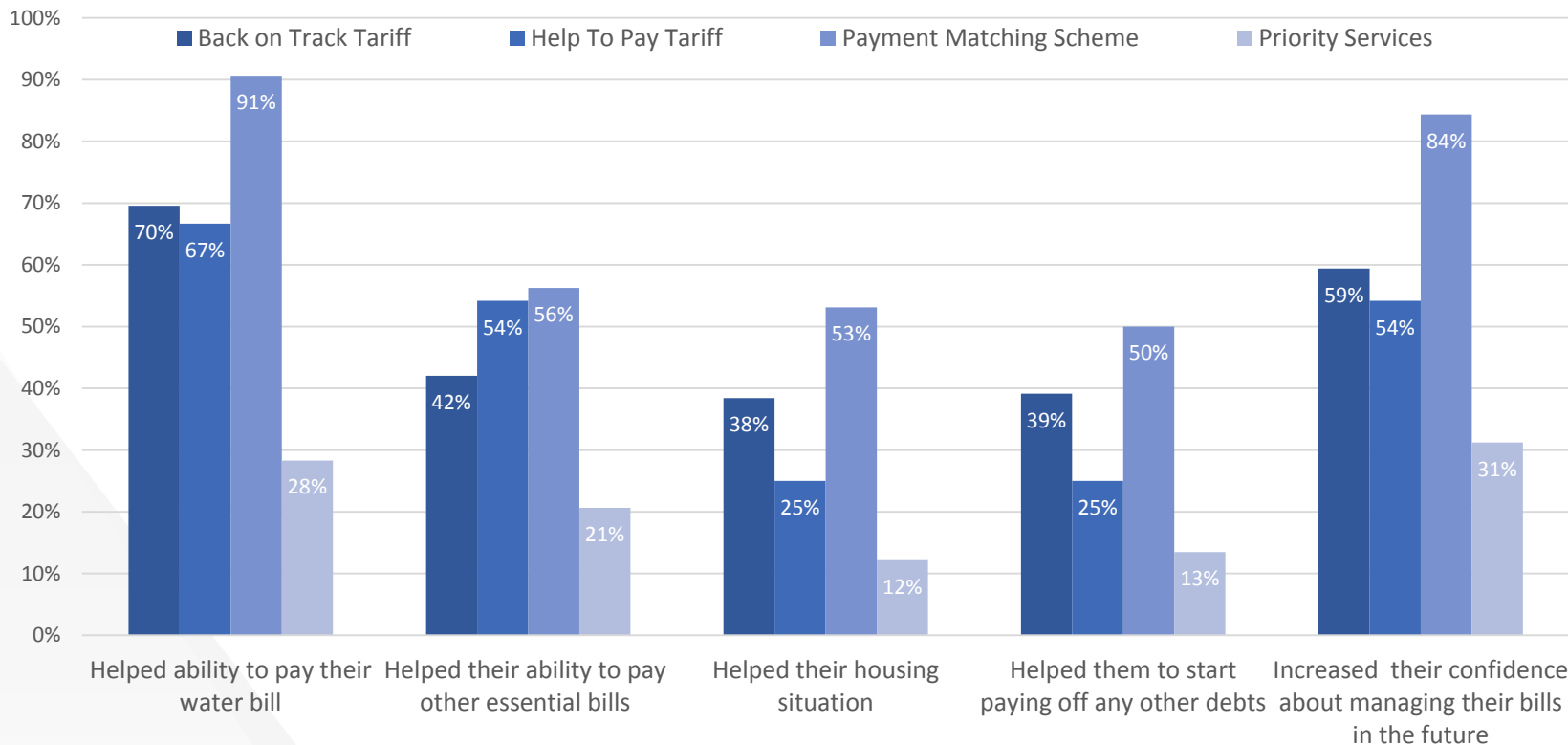
Changes seen after receiving support from the schemes

Customers reported improvements in a number of areas since receiving support from the fund. Across all schemes, mental health was the area that customers most often saw an improvement in. For customers noting that areas of their own life had not improved, over half (57%) noted that the lack of improvement was related to additional challenges brought about by the cost of living crisis.

Own life				
Area of improvement	Back on Track Tariff	Help To Pay Tariff	Payment Matching Scheme	Priority Services
Mental health	27%	25%	50%	19%
Healthy eating	17%	21%	16%	14%
Physical health	19%	8%	28%	10%
Relationships with family or partner	25%	8%	28%	11%
Relationships with friends	22%	8%	25%	10%
Job or employment status	14%	0%	22%	5%

Partner's and/or family's life				
Area of improvement	Back on Track Tariff	Help To Pay Tariff	Payment Matching Scheme	Priority Services
Mental health	13%	17%	25%	10%
Healthy eating	12%	8%	16%	9%
Physical health	10%	4%	19%	6%
Relationships with family or partner	11%	17%	13%	8%
Relationships with friends	10%	4%	9%	6%
Job or employment status	7%	0%	9%	4%

Additionally, customers noted that the schemes had helped them manage their water bills, as well as other household bills and debt



For three of the four schemes, the vast majority of respondents felt that their debt or bills would have got worse without support from that scheme

- Among **Payment Matching** customers, 94% felt that their debt or bills would have got worse without support from the scheme. This value was also high for those on the **Back on Track tariff** (at 75%), and those on the **Help to Pay tariff** (at 67%).
- Just over a quarter (28%) of those on the **Priority Services** scheme believed that their debt or bills would have got worse without support from that scheme. This lower value likely reflects the fact that the majority of customers were on this scheme due to being classed as vulnerable due to a health condition or disability or old age, rather than due to financial struggles.

Few respondents received any funding or support other than that given by United Utilities

- Among **Help to Pay tariff** customers, 13% received funding/support from another source. This fell to 6% of customers on the **Payment Matching scheme**, 6% of **Priority Services customers**, and 4% of **Back on Track tariff** customers.
- The most common form of support received was government cost of living crisis payments to help with council tax. Other support mentioned by a small minority of customers included debt advice from Citizens Advice, family support, and food bank vouchers.



Answering
tomorrow's
challenges
today

Customer views on United Utilities

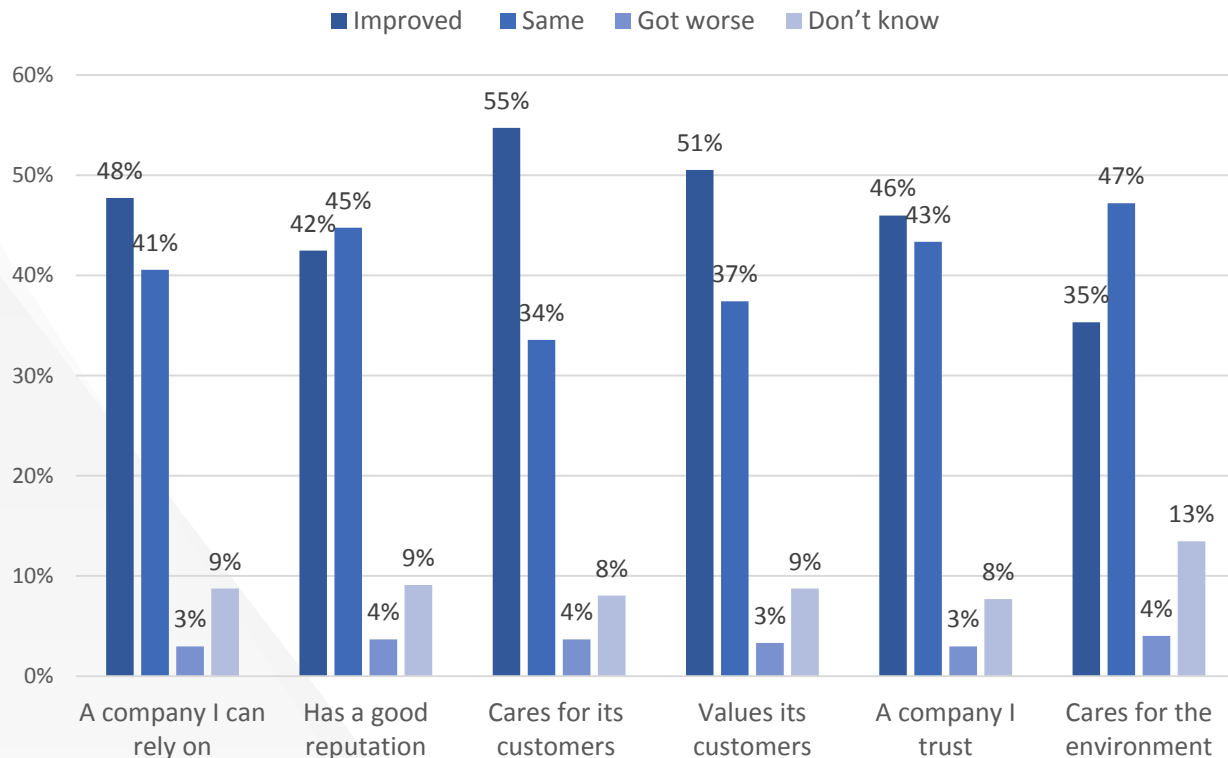


For many customers, the schemes have had a positive effect on their view of United Utilities

Criteria (% saying their view of UU has improved)	Back on Track Tariff	Help To Pay Tariff	Payment Matching Scheme	Priority Services
United Utilities is a company I can rely on	57%	54%	84%	41%
United Utilities has a good reputation	54%	46%	75%	35%
United Utilities cares for its customers	64%	54%	84%	49%
United Utilities values its customers	63%	50%	81%	43%
United Utilities is a company I trust	58%	46%	81%	39%
United Utilities cares for the environment	46%	33%	75%	28%

- The proportion of customers on the **Payment Matching scheme** noting that their views of United Utilities have improved since receiving support from the scheme is significantly higher than customers on any of the other three schemes, across all criteria.
- This likely reflects that a higher percentage of those on the **Payment Matching scheme** (94%) felt that their debt or bills would have got worse without support from the scheme, compared to customers on the **Back on Track tariff** (75%), the **Help to Pay tariff** (67%) and the **Priority Services scheme** (28%).

However, for a small number of customers the schemes did have a negative effect on their view of United Utilities



- Respondents were not asked to specify why their views had changed. However, those noting their views 'got worse' are driven by customers on the **Priority Services scheme**.
- Survey responses to open questions for a minority of the **Priority Services scheme** customers indicate a degree of confusion as to what the service could/should be providing them with (see below quotes), which may have contributed to the less positive view of United Utilities overall.

"Sometimes the scheme and benefits are not always clear"

"I have received no support from Priority Services."

Percentages are for all schemes combined. As noted in the previous slide there is considerable variation between some schemes across the criteria listed.

However, overall customers are satisfied with United Utilities services

Criteria	Average score (out of 10)
United Utilities provide its services at a good price	6.7
United Utilities is a company I trust	7.3
United Utilities care about the local area	6.7
United Utilities is a company I can rely on	7.4
United Utilities is good at communicating with their customers	7.5
I don't know much about United Utilities	5.1
I would like to know more about United Utilities	5.1
United Utilities provide good value	6.7



Answering
tomorrow's
challenges
today

United Utilities SROI survey: Headline survey findings February 2023



Answering
tomorrow's
challenges
today