



South East Water becomes the first water company to achieve Inclusive Service Verification

“BSI verification is recognition of the positive steps being made by South East Water and its commitment to strive for excellent service for its customers.”

Zoe Mcleod, Vulnerability Specialist and Independent Customer Challenge Group Chair

Customer benefits

- Provides framework to help ensure customers are treated equally and fairly, whatever their circumstances
- Able to identify vulnerable customers and adapt to their needs
- Re-enforcement of internal values and commitments to best practice
- Third party evidence of this commitment

At a glance

South East Water provides water services to 2.2 million customers. Through a network of 9,000 miles of pipe, it delivers 517 million litres of water every day.

With almost 1,000 employees servicing customers in parts of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, it has an annual turnover of over £224 million.

Business background

South East Water's 2015 to 2020 business plan includes innovative customer satisfaction measures, which led to a cultural change across the business that put customers at the heart of everything it does.

It wanted to step up its approach to customers, especially those with vulnerable circumstances, for example mobility issues or medical conditions. The organization wanted to ensure that it had a robust, independent view and framework of how well it was supporting customers, to measure the impact, and identify further improvements.

Steve George, Customer Services Director, explains, "Our vision is to be the water company people want to be supplied by and want to work for. To support the delivery of this vision we made a commitment which helps us focus on how we run our business today and how we plan for the long-term with our employees ensuring our customers are the priority in everything we do."

The challenge

As an industry, water companies are being challenged to improve the service they offer for all customers, to clearly promote services and be more transparent in everything they do. The utility sector as a whole has been rising to this challenge, working collaboratively to establish best practice and initiatives to support customers.

This, coupled with South East Water's aspiration to enhance the way it supports customers with their individual needs, led it to prove this commitment via third party verification.

The solution

To deliver better services, South East Water has a dedicated Customer Challenge Group (CCG) that is made up of experts across a diverse range who after working with vulnerability expert members found BSI's Inclusive Service Verification scheme to be the best fit for its needs.

BSI's Inclusive Service Verification demonstrates that a company is compliant to BS 18477 requirements and helps to:

- Encourage the use of fair, ethical and inclusive practices, improving access to services for all
- Support organizations with identifying vulnerable consumers, and understanding how to treat them fairly
- Increase consumer confidence in service providers, by helping the organization

to understand what consumers should expect from them

"We didn't feel that a viable alternative existed that provided the recognition and trust, that a BSI backed scheme does," remarks George.

Implementation

"As this was a new process, we were understandably cautious as we got started. However, our BSI Account Manager was very helpful throughout the process to help allay any of our early concerns," Steve George continued.

"The process itself was fairly straight forward, and we gained commitment from many employees at all levels. We particularly drew on the experience of our quality team to support the initial internal review of our processes, as well as enhancements to our existing quality management processes.

"The BSI team was available for support when required and recognized that each company has its own unique way of working."

Heather Nowak, BSI Scheme Manager for Inclusive Service Verification said:

"South East Water took a structured approach to the BSI assessment process and should be proud that it's the first UK water company to achieve the BS 18477 Inclusive Service Verification certificate, a testament to its hard work ensuring inclusivity is embedded across all areas of customer service."

Benefits

BSI verification has helped South East Water to assure stakeholders and customers that it is committed to supporting all customers whatever their circumstances. "It provides a framework that ensures that we continually assess our delivery against the commitments that we've made," said George. "This approach simply spring-boarded from our existing work and is providing a high value return, based on customer and stakeholder perception, compared to the cost of implementation.

"This verification provides a tangible and meaningful way for us to promote the hard work that we do for our customers and gives our employees recognition for their commitment. We expect to see an increase in our efficiency through this verification and new method of working.

"Having the evidence to demonstrate that we are undertaking the right things, at the right time for customers, particularly for

customers with individual circumstances that may make them vulnerable, has been fantastic. We are proud to achieve recognition for the work we undertake – and confirm that we always strive to do the right things for our customers."

Zoe Mcleod, Vulnerability Specialist and Customer Challenge Group Chair, said: "Credit where credit's due, South East Water should be commended for being the first British water company to officially achieve the BSI verification for inclusive customer service.

"Not all companies have had the courage to open themselves up to this level of independent scrutiny and benchmarking. South East Water is working hard to ensure that all its customers can easily access its services, for example those who don't use the internet, who have a long-term illness, mental health problems, mobility challenges or disabilities.

"This BSI verification is recognition of the positive steps being made by South East Water and their commitment to strive for excellent service for its customers. Achieving verification against this standard will provide a firm basis from which the company can make further improvements, helping to lead the industry in good practice to support customers in vulnerable situations."

Why BSI?

BSI's reputation and recommendation from other vulnerability experts were key factors in South East Water choosing its Inclusive Service Verification scheme.

"Many other utility companies could benefit from BSI's Inclusive Verification Scheme," said Zoe. "It provides a robust framework that allows an organisation to identify vulnerable customers, support them in treating them fairly whilst differentiating itself from the crowd.

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