Customer insights: questions and answers

Public Sector Scotland: Water Forums 2023

business stream
A SCOTTISH WATER COMPANY

Introduction

As part of a drive to understand your needs and ensure we continue to improve the services that we provide to you, we conducted a series of Water Forum events for some of our Public Sector Scotland (PSS) customers during 2023. The forums provided an opportunity for us to proactively listen to your priorities and concerns, as well as greater insights into how we can operate more effectively together.

We hosted three PSS Water Forum events during 2023, in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. The topics covered were wide-ranging and while there was positive feedback in the areas of billing, servicing and account management, we also noted some persistent challenges that our customers are facing along with a wealth of opportunities where we can offer more support, notably with the online My Business Stream (MyBS) portal experience, customer reporting and Scottish Water communications about asset replacements and incidents.

The feedback received has helped to positively shape our propositions, the services we deliver and highlighted areas where we need to influence key stakeholders across the Scottish water market.

This pack includes a range of questions and answers (Q&As) relating to specific challenges and opportunities experienced by our PSS customers. The Q&As are presented across several themes, including billing, metering, account management and water efficiency, and responses, where appropriate include details of the relevant actions and feedback on next steps.

Theme: My Business Stream (MyBS)

Q: Can I download PDF bills in bulk on My Business Stream?

A: Yes. You can do this by viewing your consolidated bill and selecting the option to ‘Download PDF bundle as ZIP’. If you’d like support with this, please contact your account manager.

Q: How can I find out more about the functionality available on MyBS?

A: We’re created a suite of MyBS ‘how to’ videos to help you understand the functionality available on MyBS and how best to navigate around the platform. Soon, you'll find the videos under the ‘Help & Advice’ section on your MyBS dashboard. If you’d like support, please contact your account manager.

Q: The Keys Servicing team are unable to view my MyBS dashboard which limits their ability to support me with dashboard queries. Is anything being done to improve this?

A: Thank you for your feedback and we’re really sorry for the inconvenience caused. These restrictions on access are in place for security reasons. As the authorised contact, you can make a request for your account manager or case owner to be given visibility of your MyBS dashboard. To do this, and for security reasons, this request must come from yourself to your account manager or case owner in writing.

Q: Do I need both my customer account number and Supply Point ID (SPID) number when submitting a meter reading?

A: Yes. This is part of the validation process so that we can ensure the meter reading provided relates to the relevant account and can be processed successfully.

Q: There is a Power BI login on the MyBS portal but it’s not clear what it’s for or how to use it?

A. We are currently developing a suite of reports for you to view and download on MyBS. Once the functionality is available, we’ll provide training on how to access it. We anticipate that these reports will be available in February 2024.

Q: Some of the functionality on MyBS, like the search filter, is useful but it isn't always clear how to use it. How can I find out more?

A: We recently began rolling out MyBS webinar training sessions to Public Sector Scotland (PSS) customers during 2023 and early 2024. These sessions explored how to use the platform's functionality with a focus on the search filter. We plan to conduct further MyBS webinars later in 2024 which will explore additional functionality available on the platform, for example, reporting. If you would benefit from additional support, please get in touch with your account manager who will be happy to help, or keep a look out for details on forthcoming webinars.

Q: Will I receive confirmation once I submit a form on MyBS?

A: Yes. You'll see a notification once you submit a form to confirm it has been received successfully.

Q: MyBS doesn't offer some reporting that was previously really valuable for example, consumption and carbon reporting. Will these reports be available soon?

A: Yes. We've recently built reporting functionality in Power BI which will allow you to view and download a wide range of reports from MyBS. We'll let you know as soon as this service is available. In the meantime, please get in touch with your account manager who will be able to provide reports to you.

Q: Until the new reporting functionality in Power BI is launched on MyBS - how can I request reports?

A: Please request any required reports from your case owner or account manager who will be happy to help. We'll notify you as soon as the new report functionality is available on MyBS.

Theme: Billing

Q: When my account is in credit, why isn't the balance automatically refunded to my bank account?

A: We don't automatically issue a refund of credit balances. Instead, due to the varying nature of how customer accounts are structured, we manage refunds on a case-by-case basis. If you would like to request a refund, please contact your case owner or account manager who will be happy to help. Any credit balance will be clearly displayed on your invoice.

Q: Is it possible to receive an in-advance, monthly email summary detailing which of my sites have or have not been billed, with details of the charges and consumption volumes? This would be helpful for our financial management and accruals.

A: Unfortunately, we're unable to produce this report in advance of billing. However, once the billing process has completed, we receive an output of any accounts which have not been billed in the month, which we can share with you. If you would like to view these details relating to your portfolio, please get in touch with your account manager.

Q: The payment method, annual Pay in Advance (PIA), is preferred because our current payment method, quarterly in advance, requires a lot of extra work and reconciliation as well as extra workload for finance teams relative to the additional discount available.

A. Thank you for your feedback. We have taken these comments on board and we will be offering annual PIA under the new framework, effective from April 2024.

Q: Can you present a view of billing per meter on my bills, for example – total bill divided by meter consumption, so that our charges can be attributed and passed on more easily?

A: Unfortunately, we're unable to break down the charging for multi-meter accounts on your bill. Our billing process aligns to the market structure which means we're unable to deviate from this. For example, drainage charges apply to the account as a whole and not at a meter level. Consumption and fixed charges relating to each meter are currently broken down in detail on your bill.

Q: Can I receive my consolidated bill earlier each month?

A: In line with the PSS framework agreement, we've committed to delivering consolidated billing to customers by no later than the 10th business day of each month. Currently, we deliver consolidated billing around business day five of each month, which balances the desire for timely billing with the need to complete bill validation and quality checks to ensure the accuracy of charges.

Theme: Metering

Q: When our automated meter reading (AMR) unit has failed in the past, I experienced quite a delay in Business Stream replacing it again. Has this improved?

A: Thank you for your feedback. We're very sorry to hear that you experienced a delay in having your AMR replaced. We aim to respond as quickly as possible and replace any equipment to ensure we maintain the level of service you need. If you experience any issues in the future, please get in touch with your account manager and they will ensure the issue is dealt with promptly.

Q: Sometimes the calculations for my sub-meter charges are inaccurate on my bill. Why is this?

A: We're very sorry for this and have recently carried out some amendments to our billing system to fix this issue. If you have any further queries on this, please get in touch with your case owner or account manager who will be happy to help.

Q: What measures are currently in place to alert me if a sudden spike in consumption occurs on my account?

A: We currently use a number of systems to alert you if we see unusual consumption trends on your account. This includes AMR alarms which will alert you to any unusual continuous consumption on a meter and our billing system GCW also has a validation process that will highlight any meters where the average daily consumption has increased by 200%, dropped by 80% or where zero or negative consumption has been recorded. Details of the impacted sites will then be fed back to you by your dedicated case owner or account manager and we'll support you with the next steps. Further service enhancements will be available under the new framework contract and we'll share details with you on that soon.

Q: Can you confirm how you process my meter readings to produce my bill?

A. All meter readings, whether generated via AMR or a reading you have submitted yourself, are processed in the same way. Once we have your latest meter reading, it goes through an automated validation process where it is also checked for any abnormalities, for example evidence of a slow leak or a faulty meter, before it's uploaded to our billing system. We previously processed AMR readings five business days before the end of the month but, following customer feedback, we've now reduced this to three business days so that the meter reading date is as close to the billing date as possible, while still allowing time to thoroughly validate the reading data for accuracy.

Q: Sometimes, the timing of communications we receive, for example trade effluent billing, could be better. Is there anything being done to improve this going forward?

A: Thank you for your feedback. We are reviewing our current approach to communications so that we can provide more proactive updates to you across a range of alternative channels. If we need to let you know about important information relating to your account, we'll ensure we do this as early as possible.

Q: Are there any cheaper alternatives to my current automated meter reader (AMR)?

A: There are a range of AMR options available in the market however, not all have the reliability and quality you currently experience with the AMRs we provide. We will continue to review the market and make you aware of any new products that become available.

Q: Do you offer support for customers with unmetered sites who would benefit from having a meter or an AMR installed to lower costs?

A. Yes. We proactively review our customers' unmetered sites and will get in touch to advise you if it would be more cost effective to have a meter installed, wherever it is feasible to do this. If you would like to raise a request to have a meter installed in the meantime, please get in touch with your case owner or account manager.

Q: Are there other ways to download my AMR data from the AMR portal? Sometimes I find it a bit complicated.

A. Yes. We offer different report options for extracting your data from the AMR portal including flow data reporting, summary reporting of all sites and even specific time period reports. If you'd like support with this, please get in touch with your account manager who will be happy to help. We will be offering service enhancements under the new framework, which will increase the accessibility of AMR data, and we'll share more details on this with you soon.

Theme: Customer and account management

Q: The monthly catch-ups with our case owner are really helpful but we'd benefit from more in advance notice of changes that impact us, including information on developments across MyBS.

A: Thank you for your feedback. We are reviewing our current approach to communications with the aim of providing more proactive updates to you across a range of alternative channels. We'll ensure that all future developments of our systems and processes, including MyBS, are communicated to you as early as possible, with sufficient details provided. We'll also proactively engage PSS customers in the development of any new functionality for MyBS, to make sure it meets the needs of our customers.

Q: Is it possible for me to view any cases that I have open with Business Stream?

A: Yes. You can view all of your open and closed cases on the MyBS portal using the left-hand menu on your dashboard. If you have any difficulties finding these details on the portal, please reach out to your case owner or account manager and they will be happy to help.

Q: When viewing my open and closed cases on MyBS, I have noticed that some of the cases I previously raised are missing. Why is this?

A: If you find that any of your cases are missing from the list on your MyBS account, please get in touch with your case owner or account manager so we can investigate this further.

Q: We're commencing our budget planning for the next financial year. When can we expect to see the potential price changes for the next year?

A: Scottish Water release their wholesale charges for the forthcoming year around December or January. We will share the charging details with you by 31 March 2024.

Q: Are you able to offer small group training sessions on services like MyBS, automated meter reading, and billing? We find these more beneficial than larger sessions.

A. We recently held some successful MyBS training sessions for smaller groups of customers and plan to host more, following the positive feedback that we received. We're currently looking at extending these sessions to cover other areas, including automated meter reading and billing, and will reach out to invite you to attend in due course.

Q: Can Business Stream proactively offer the same tariff optimisation, water audits and survey reviews, for example, surface water drainage (SWD) and return to sewer (RTS) reviews, that some third parties provide?

A: Yes. We have an in-house team who offer all of these services. To help support with funding, we can also consider a gainshare arrangement if this is of interest to you. To find out more and request any of these services, please get in touch with your account manager.

Theme: Water efficiency

Q: Where can I find the 'value-added services' you offer? And is there a way I can find out more?

A: You can view our value-added services in the Welcome Pack and value-added services rate card which we provided at the beginning of the framework contract. If you would like another copy of this, please request this from your account manager. Working in partnership with our Solutions team, your case owner or account manager can support you in reducing your costs using our value-added services. They can provide you with data to help you fully understand your water consumption and can provide advice on how to control, manage and reduce it. We're also planning to host a number of webinars in 2024, which we'll invite you to, providing a comprehensive overview of our value-added services.

Q: How can we proactively monitor all water usage and loss, including heated water loss?

A: Our Account Managers, working in partnership with our value-added services (Solutions) team, are able to audit sites and recommend where it may be appropriate to fit sub-meters to help identify where water is being used and lost. This would include hot water systems. Identifying and reducing the loss of hot water, and therefore reducing energy consumption, which has a significant cost and environmental benefit. Please speak to your account manager for more information.

Q: Can you help us engage with Scottish Water to address issues we're having relating to our cold water storage temperature, which a number of customers are impacted by?

A. We've provided details of this issue to Scottish Water's senior management team. Once we receive an update from them, we'll be in touch to with all impacted customers to provide more details. We'll also be inviting Scottish Water to attend our regional Customer Forums in 2024, so you'll have an opportunity to engage with them directly there.

Q: The Water Efficiency Fund is great. Is there any scope to increase the amount of money available in the fund so more customers can benefit?

A. We appreciate your feedback and can confirm that the Water Efficiency Fund provision is being increased under the new Framework. We'll share more details with you soon.

Q: Is there a way to identify the top 10 water consuming sites for my organisation, and then support for us to carry out analysis on each site's water consumption?

A: Yes. We've recently built report functionality which allows you to view and download details of sites where the average daily water consumption either increases or decreases by 10% or more and to view the top 10 sites by average daily consumption. You'll soon be able to download these new reports through the My Business Stream portal and we'll let you know once this service is available. In the meantime, please get in touch with your account manager who will be able to provide the requested reports to you.

Q: Are you able to share your case studies more widely?

A. Yes. You can view all of our published case studies on our main website by visiting business-stream.co.uk/our-services/case-studies. And we also share our Public Sector specific case studies in our quarterly newsletter. Our latest case studies will soon be available on the My Business Stream portal too.

Q: Are you able to share information and queries from the Public Sector group meetings, such as Scottish Energy Officers Network (SEON), with all PSS customers?

A: Yes, we currently provide updates from these sessions to the NHS Energy Forum (NEF) and Advanced Procurement for Universities and Colleges (APUC) members. Where appropriate, we'll share content and updates more widely through our quarterly PSS newsletters.

Q: We would like AMR or SMART metering installed across our sites but our own procurement process is taking a long time. Are you able to influence this from your end?

A: We're happy to speak to your procurement teams to promote the value of using AMRs across your sites. We can also provide case studies, relevant to the Scottish Public Sector specifically, as well as other businesses that show the potential savings and return on investment that can be achieved by installing AMRs. Please get in touch with your account manager if you'd like support with your procurement process.

Q: Can you ensure that, when SMART meters are introduced, the data is easy to access and understand?

A: We're working closely with Scottish Water to help ensure the data provided from the roll-out of SMART meters will meet customer needs. Currently, Scottish Water are developing a national SMART metering strategy which is anticipated to be finalised in early 2024. We'll share more information with you when it is available.

Q: Is there a report available that compares water consumption between similar sites, for example schools or health centres?

A. Yes. We've recently built functionality which allows you to view and download benchmarking reports, providing you with a demand profile, forecasting and other support information. You'll be able to download specific reports soon, through the My Business Stream portal and we'll let you know once this is available. In the meantime, please get in touch with your account manager who will be able to provide requested reports to you.

Theme: Reporting

Q: Are we able to view and download bespoke reports on MyBS?

A: We've recently built new report functionality to support your requirements. Soon, you'll be able to download specific reports through the My Business Stream portal and we'll let you know once this service is available. In the meantime, please get in touch with your account manager who will be able to provide requested reports to you.

Q: Some of the Monitoring & Targeting (M&T) files have been incomplete or inaccurate, for example, in the past some of my bills have not been included. Is this issue being fixed?

A: Yes. At the time of transfer, we made the decision to delay the billing of some accounts to ensure complete bill accuracy which resulted in some sites not being billed in the initial months following the migration and we're sorry for any inconvenience this caused. We can confirm that these issues have now been resolved and we're currently billing over c.99.5% of PSS sites every month. If you would like to discuss this, please get in touch with your case owner or account manager.

In addition, we are aware that some M&T providers have had challenges ingesting our billing data, following the transfer to our billing system, Gentrack Cloud for Water. We've been working closely with M&T providers to support them with system developments and the management of our billing files In order to improve the completeness of the billing data within their systems.

Q: Have you considered carrying out your own customer satisfaction survey with Scottish Public Sector customers, outside of the one conducted by Scottish Procurement? This would allow the opportunity for more water specific questions.

A. Yes. We're working on a new customer satisfaction survey which we'll roll out to all Scottish Public Sector customers later in the year.

Q: Are you able to share long unread meter reports? Doing this would allow us to help locate and take readings for our meters.

A. Yes. We can share a copy of your long unread meter reports. To request this, please get in touch with your case owner or account manager who will be able to provide this information to you.

Q: Currently, M&T systems using the EDI output are unable to process the -1p charge for the first 20m³ of water consumption. Is anything being done to resolve this?

A. Following the launch of the -1p rate, which was set up to ensure we delivered our framework commitment to provide the first 20m³ of water consumption for free, we later learned that EDI files are unable to process negative rates across any utility charge. We're currently working on a solution which we plan to put in place from 1 April 2024 and we'll get in touch with you ahead of this change to let you know the details. In the meantime, please note that CSV files do not have the same limitation and can be used as an alternative.

Q: Are you able to quickly report on any consumption changes for sites without AMRs, so that we can manage our water consumption more effectively?

A: We currently use a number of systems to alert you if we see unusual consumption trends on your account. Our billing system GCW has a validation process that will highlight any meters, regardless of whether they are AMR or not, where the average daily consumption has increased by 200%, dropped by 80%, or where zero or negative consumption has been recorded. Details of the impacted sites will then be fed back to you by your dedicated case owner or account manager and we'll support you with the next steps. In some cases, the effectiveness of this service may be limited due to your meter reading frequency for example, bi-annual readings. In addition, you'll soon be able to download consumption reports through the My Business Stream portal and we'll let you know once this is available. In the meantime, please get in touch with your account manager who will be able to provide requested reports to you.

Q: Can you provide details on how you calculate the annualised savings that you publicly report on?

A. Yes. To request more detailed information about our reported savings, please get in touch with your account manager.

Theme: Wholesaler management

Q: It would be helpful to be notified of any delays to work that Scottish Water are carrying out. Is there anything you can do to support this?

A: We have internal processes set up to proactively request updates from Scottish Water while they are carrying out work. We can also escalate any issues through our internal Wholesale Service Desk and monthly account meetings. If you require any updates on specific work being undertaken by Scottish Water, please get in touch with your case owner or account manager who will be happy to help.

Q: When we raise a request with Scottish Water, can I include details of a named site contact?

A. Yes. When we raise a request for Scottish Water to carry out any work, there is an option to include a named site contact. If you would like a specific named contact, please let your case owner know and we'll include that information when completing the Scottish Water request form.

Q: Are we able to choose our preferred Licensed Provider (LP) for any gap sites?

A: Yes. From September 2023, the market process changed to allow customers to choose their LP for any gap sites. Scottish Water now write directly to the relevant supply address to provide notice that the Supply Point ID (SPID) will be allocated and invite you to contact them to select your preferred LP.

Q: Are you able to report back on any Rateable Value (RV) changes more in advance than previously? This would help set expectations for our bills.

A. There was a delay in updating the RVs following the most recent revaluation exercise in 2023 but, Scottish Water are working with the Market Operator to remedy this in time for the next revaluation in 2026. As soon as we receive any market transaction updates for rateable value changes, we'll get in touch with you to let you know.

Q: Sometimes, sub-contractors sent to our sites on behalf of Scottish Water don't have the information they need to carry out the work required. Can you ensure information is shared with contractors ahead of them arriving on site, for example the meter serial number where work on a specific meter is required?

A: We have regular operational meetings with Scottish Water and we've shared this feedback with them to ensure their contractors arrive at site with the information needed to carry out the work. If you would like to raise any additional feedback about specific issues, please get in touch with your account manager or case owner and we'll work with Scottish Water to address this.

Q: Where appropriate, it would be helpful to have direct contact with Scottish Water to help us solve problems more quickly. Is this an option?

A: We can approach Scottish Water on your behalf to request a tri-partite meeting between you, ourselves and Scottish Water. If you would like to request this, please get in touch with your account manager who will be happy to help.