

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
22 Feb 2024
Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Andrea Cook	Chair
Chris Griffin	Independent Member
Dave Merrett	Independent Member
John Walker	Consumer Council for Water
Kursh Siddique	Independent Member
James Copeland	National Farmers Union
Tom Keatley	Natural England

Apologies:

Jamie Ashton	Citizens Advice
Melissa Lockwood	Environment Agency
Steve Grebby	Consumer Council for Water

Guests:

Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
John Thomas	Yorkshire Water
Sarah Mason	Yorkshire Water
Tom Greenwood	Yorkshire Water

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1. Minutes

The January minutes have been signed off and will be published accordingly.

2. Actions

a) Open and in-progress actions were reviewed.

b) Actions from September:

- i. *The Company to provide information about proportion of green measures (for Waste water) in the final programme.* The Company updated that 3 wetland schemes for phosphorus removal are planned for AMP8 compared with 2 in AMP7. 42 SUDS/attenuation/surface water separation for storm overflows are planned for AMP8 compared with zero in AMP7. One sewage treatment works storage reduction due to green infrastructure planned for AMP8 compared with zero in AMP7. One wetland for sewage treatment works growth vs zero in AMP7. A Forum member noted a significant uplift in the activity, but also concerns about deliverability and customer communication. They pointed out the importance of making sure teams are trained not just in implementation but also in long term management and maintenance. The Company agreed that customers are asking to be better updated on how money is being spent which is likely to drive longer term customer engagement. **Closed.**

c) Actions from November:

- i. *The Company to provide feedback on CCW's assessment of the PR24 plan.* Addressed in January's meeting. **Closed.**
- ii. *The Company to consider what customer research will be presented to the A&V subgroup, the Environment subgroup and the main Forum meetings.* The Company explained their expectation that more in-depth feedback would be sought from the A&V subgroup on all affordability and vulnerability specific research without wanting to deny the opportunity for the full forum to see this important work. A Forum member agreed that the subgroups would be expected to undertake deep dives, but equally to bring anything back to the Forum they felt needed its attention. The Forum agreed trust was needed that the right information would be directed to the most relevant audience. **Closed.**
- iii. *The Affordability and Vulnerability (A&V) subgroup to be restarted in the new year.* Dates are in the diary for throughout 2024 from March. **Closed.**

- iv. *The Company to provide a copy of their annual customer research programme. Presented at the January meeting. **Closed.***
- d) Actions from January:
 - i. *Environment and A&V subgroups back on track along with production and publication of monthly Forum minutes. Invitations sent for meetings for both subgroups. Minutes completed, reviewed and published up to November 2023. **Closed.***
 - ii. *Minutes and papers for the monthly Forum meetings, as well as the subgroups, to be circulated at least 1 week in advance. Progress has been made. **In progress.***
 - iii. *CCW to circulate details of overall research assessment to Forum members. Circulated. **Closed.***
 - iv. *The Company to circulate the outcome of the Horizon scanning with details of how this will feed into Customer Research and Business Planning. The Company to bring details to a future meeting. **Open.***
- e) The Company noted there is an upcoming debrief for a customer research project about Horizon Scanning. The Forum members will be invited and a recording shared on PR24 document hub (OneDrive) along with the WaterSupport debrief recording.
- f) New actions for February:
 - i. **Action 1:** The Company to provide an overview of queries received by subject matter.
 - ii. **Action 2:** Circulate the slides which CCW presented.
 - iii. **Action 3:** CCW to provide further evidence on the ramped billing recommendation.
 - iv. **Action 4:** The Company to report back to The Forum with details of any independent observer and the criteria for the projects' inclusion [Working with Others PC].
 - v. **Action 5:** The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with The Forum [Working with Others PC].
 - vi. **Action 6:** Add an Environment subgroup agenda item – deep dive Working with Others PC schemes, prioritised by spend.
 - vii. **Action 7:** The Company to share the evidence pack for Inclusive Customer Service with The Forum by 1st March.

- viii. **Action 8:** The Company to ask whether the research agency could share details of the charities represented directly with The Forum [Inclusive Customer Service PC].

3. Update from Environment subgroup

- a) A promising initial meeting with encouraging discussions and content and a comprehensive overview of PR24's environment aspects given.
- b) Defra has been making enquiries about the timing of a couple of items including telemetry for CSO outfalls. Whilst CCW pointed out that data exists on telemetry on waste water plants etc. this isn't readily available to the public, leaving a gap.
- c) The WRMP update provided a significant update on notice being given by Severn Trent to end transfer from them to The Company. This has short and longer term implications on the improvements to the distribution system.
- d) Length of River Improvement (LORI) was updated.
- e) AMP8 CSO programme updated; AMP7 was deferred to the next meeting.
- f) On Bathing Waters, the number of excellent-rated waters has dropped by 4 (those waters having been classified as Good). For the next AMP there will be a redefinition of the Bathing Water standards, including measurement during high rainfall events which were previously excluded.
- g) For SSSIs, it is difficult to compare due to a significant change in definitions during the last AMP. Where it is possible to compare, blanket bog has significantly improved.
- h) The pollution issues item was deferred to the next meeting.
- i) The subgroup chair noted that subgroup members felt better sited on the environmental work being undertaken by The Company after the meeting.
- j) A subgroup member reinforced the importance of communicating the environmental issues to customers.

4. PR24 Business Plan update

- a) The Company updated that whilst there is still no certainty from Ofwat on the timetable, the draft determination is expected to be published in the first 2 weeks of June, with 8 to 10 weeks given to respond to the consultation.
- b) Ofwat have confirmed that their two Your Water, Your Say (YWYS) events will be held at the end of June, in England and Wales respectively.
- c) At the start of September, Ofwat will give senior representatives from water companies the opportunity to present key points from the draft determination response at Company Representation meetings.

- d) Ofwat's outbound query process continues, with 175 queries so far raised. This process could run until draft determination, however the rate of queries has reduced. Queries now being received tend to cover information which Ofwat hadn't original asked for.
- e) The Company are preparing for draft determination with further research to strengthen evidence and highlight customer support.
- f) A Forum member asked whether any of the queries relating to new information were pertinent to the Forum in terms of areas the Forum has supported or raised concerns about previously. The Company offered to provide an overview of the volumes of queries received by subject matter. The Forum member questioned whether Ofwat were probing more now as a result of the Your Water, Your Say events. The Company reflected that it wasn't obvious there was any direct connection between the YWYS event and the queries from Ofwat.
- g) The Forum chair point out that it is customary for the Forum to provide a written report on the draft determination.

Action 1: The Company to provide an overview of queries received by subject matter.

5. Quarterly Reporting and the Service Commitment Plan

- a) Ofwat have put in an additional pilot process for all companies to provide quarterly information on performance one month after a preceding quarter, for example October to December's quarter was reported at the end of January.
- b) This will provide Ofwat with a better understanding of performance throughout the year rather than waiting for Annual Performance Reports (APR) in July.
- c) Focus of these is the performance of 11 Performance Commitments. This information is also published on the website.
- d) **The Service Commitment Plan** – Ofwat assesses water company performance on an annual basis and ranks companies into 3 categories: Leading, Average and Lagging. YW, along with 6 other companies, is currently in the Lagging category. The remaining companies are classed as Average. No companies are currently classed as Leading.
- e) As a result, The Company has published its Service Commitment Plan which sets out where it is not meeting the Performance Commitment target in AMP7 and sets out the actions in place to improve performance.
- f) The Company shared a matrix highlighting where performance is against the target.
- g) As part of the Service Commitment Plan, The Company provided an update to Ofwat of where they expected to be at the end of the year. It was expected that

six of the Performance Commitment targets would be met. The update shared with Ofwat at the end of January shows five will be achieved rather than six.

- h) The Leakage target is on track to be met, building on improvements seen in 22/23. Performance on the Priority Service Register has significantly improved and target will be reached.
- i) For Customer Experience (CMEX) where Ofwat ranks companies, The Company was ranked 11th. The Company aimed to get to the middle of the pack; Ofwat assesses the target to have been met if 8th place is reached. At the end of January, The Company has been ranked as 10th. This reflects an improvement compared to last year, although 8th place hasn't been reached. Looking at quarter 3 in isolation ranks The Company as 9th. At this stage it is unlikely that 8th place will be achieved.
- j) The Company also pointed out the additional challenge on performance of the adverse weather, particularly rainfall, over the last quarter. The six named storms have made performance elements such as internal sewer flooding and pollution incidents more challenging.
- k) The Company shared a visual which showed the volume of initiatives designed to support each of the Service Commitments, alongside examples of some of the initiatives.
- l) A Forum member asked if CMEX was a 2-question survey? The Company explained that the CMEX survey comprises two cohorts; one who haven't had contact with The Company who are asked a general satisfaction with service question; the other cohort have had contact and are asked about satisfaction with that service. So it is a two question survey, meaning scope for analysis is limited. Despite that, analysis of the comments is undertaken to grow understanding of the drivers and this is receiving a lot more attention since the new Customer Experience Director has joined.
- m) The Forum member opined that CMEX seems a blunt instrument; and that asking for recommendations in a monopoly makes limited sense; adding that movement within a ranking is difficult to follow. The Company reflected that Ofwat are thinking of moving away from CMEX to a UK CSI score – which is equally general, and that water companies have already raised concerns with Ofwat that this isn't the right approach.
- n) A Forum member queried how much of the honesty demonstrated by the company in being transparent with The Forum will come through into customer engagement and communication. The Company stated it would be keeping The Forum abreast of this.

- o) The Company shared that it hoped communicating performance against a lower number of Performance Commitments, rather than the 44 previous reported, would make the narrative easier for customers.
- p) A Forum member asked how it is determined which customers are questioned, and whether vulnerable customers were fairly represented. The Company explained that a sample of customers is sent to Ofwat who then extract a random subsample which tries to reflect regional representation and is broken down into Billing, Waste and Clean Water contacts. It is not captured which customers have vulnerabilities.

6. CCW's assessment of The Company's business plan

- a) CCW explained that their role is to ensure that companies engage well with customers and that the plans reflect customers' priorities and expectations.
- b) The business plan is a 5-year milestone in the longer term strategy.
- c) The Company is mid-table in terms of the difference in average household bills between 24/25 and 29/30, with a 49% increase. This compares to Southern Water at 74% increase and Anglian Water at 28% increase.
- d) There was an acceptability range of between 44% and 84% with The Company at 72%.
- e) Affordability ranged between 11% and 19% with The Company at 17%.
- f) Total Expenditure (TOTEX) for The Company was detailed at a 77% increase between PR19 and PR24. This compares to Thames at 91% increase and Pennon at 123%; reflecting a range between 44% and 133% with The Company being mid-range again.
- g) Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) The Company is considerably higher in terms of CSOs as a percentage of WINEP. The £2bn WINEP programme includes £1.4bn to address storm overflow spills which is above statutory target and includes further improvements to inland water quality.
- h) CCW's assessment of customer and stakeholder engagement was that The Company has conducted some very good quality, continuous research with a wide range of customers and stakeholders. And that this is reflected in the plan.
- i) CCW raised that it wasn't always clear how different sources of customer evidence were weighted in The Company's triangulation.
- j) CCW commented that The Forum's involvement in development of research materials has been inconsistent.
- k) CCW have let Ofwat know about the results of the Social Tariff research, significantly The Company repeating the research on the Social Tariff Cross Subsidy. This now shows a level of support from customers of 70%

Action 2: Circulate the slides presented by CCW.

- h) A Forum member noted that CCW seem to have recommended against what The Company had proposed, i.e. a ramped billing rather than a smooth billing, and asked for evidence which supports a ramped bill given their experience would also suggest smooth billing to be preferred.

Action 3: CCW to provide further evidence on the ramped billing recommendation.

- i) A Forum member asked who the report would be sent to. CCW clarified that it is to be presented at the independent challenge group, and that the report represents a summary of the report sent to Ofwat assessing the business plan.

7. Introduction to John Thomas, Director of Strategy and Regulation

- a) An introduction to members of The Forum was provided to John Thomas.
- b) The Chair was asked for her view on the balance between required investment in AMP8 vs increasing bills. The Chair recognised that it is difficult to strike the right balance, but emphasised the importance of consultation, customer research and the need for a safety net for the poorest and most vulnerable households.
- c) The Chair shared that The Forum are very impressed with the quality of the research undertaken.
- d) After The Forum members had introduced themselves, John gave an overview of his career experience to date.

8. Performance Commitments – Working with Others

- a) The Company reminded that the purpose of items 8 and 9 is to update The Forum ahead of asking for assurance on Performance Commitments at year end. Learnings have been taken from last year when Forum engagement was sought too late in the process.
- b) The Company's Strategy Manager for Nature First provided an update on the Working with Others PC.
- c) Taking a joined up approach is one of The Company's key pillars, there is a recognition that to deliver more for customers they must be working in partnership with all parties in a catchment to come up with the best solutions, and thinking about the bigger picture.
- d) The Working with Others PC was introduced in AMP6 in response to Environment Agency expectations around flood risk, however the PC does cover all partnerships not just flood risk.

- e) A summary position was provided on the performance against target. In this AMP so far 18 schemes have been included against a target of 18. A further 12 schemes will be taken through to audit this year meaning the PC continues to be on target. Next year, 2024/25, the target will be 15.
- f) Details were provided of the 12 schemes including
 - i. Rosmead Street – a Living with Water flood risk project in Hull related to sustainable drainage systems.
 - ii. St Nicks in York – an environmental scheme related to reconnecting rivers and nature restoration.
 - iii. Workplace Experience, Esholt & Bradford College – upgrading of Esholt offices using college students, providing work experience and skills-based training as part of a career development partnership.
 - iv. Greater Water Parsnip project – a wetland plant nursery cofunded with Freshwater Habitats Trust supplying rare wetland species to support nature restoration in Yorkshire.
 - v. DNAire – a collaboration funded by a wide range of partners to connect up the river Aire for migratory fish species and to connect communities to their environment.
 - vi. INNS Mapper – a national project to create an app for reporting Invasive and Non-Native Species.
 - vii. BNG Potential of SUDS – examining SUDS as a nature-based solution
 - viii. Lego Lessons in Schools as part of the Connected by Water flood risk partnership in Sheffield.
- g) A Forum member observed the importance of showing the value of these projects when engaging with customers. They also questioned the transparency of the decisions to include these particular projects and the criteria met. The Company explained that projects with the strongest alignment to the intention of the PC were chosen, notably the ones which are strongest in collaboration and added value to customers. Performance against these elements will be audited in April.
- h) The Forum member questioned whether there was an independent observer involved in the audit of the PC.

Action 4: The Company to report back to The Forum with details of any independent observer and the criteria for the projects' inclusion.

- i) A Forum member questioned how many customers had been engaged with in relation to the projects detailed; how the information is promoted to customers and how many are engaging with the data. The Company responded that

behind the slides presented are evidence sheets which can be shared with the Forum.

Action 5: The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with The Forum.

j) A Forum member requested that deep dives into higher cost projects, particularly the BNG SUDS project, be scheduled for the Environment subgroup.

Action 6: Add an Environment subgroup agenda item – deep dive Working with Others PC, prioritised by spend.

9. Performance Commitments – Inclusive Customer Service

a) The Company's Customer Service Strategy Manager detailed that this PC is designed to ensure services are inclusive to all customers whatever their needs. A panel of experts is presented with evidence showing actions taken to ensure services are inclusive. The PC is measured as an improvement in the scores given by this panel when surveyed annually, compared to a baseline established in 2020 at the start of the AMP.

b) The Forum was invited to consider whether the panel reflects the right representation, and to review the evidence pack before it is submitted to the panel.

c) The Company presented slides which detailed the methodology proposed.

d) It was explained that the panel of charities is not disclosed to The Company to ensure honest feedback, but that The Forum had previously been involved in helping to select the charities involved.

e) A charity representing rural communities was added last year following feedback from The Forum. Otherwise, the same group of charities are being surveyed throughout the AMP.

f) Nine questions, across three categories, are put to the panel. The categories cover sign-up and awareness; the services on offer; delivery against the offer.

g) A Forum member questioned whether a list of the organisations included in the expert panel could be shared. For reasons of anonymity this would have to be done directly by the research agency and depends on the terms participants have agreed to.

Action 7: The Company to share the evidence pack for Inclusive Customer Service with The Forum.

Action 8: The Company to ask whether the research agency could share details of the expert panel directly with The Forum.

- h) The improvement required is a 20% uplift by the end of the AMP.
- i) A Forum member asked what the definition of a service was. The Company explained that in this context it is specific to the services accessed by being on the Priority Services Register, e.g. Braille bills.
- j) The Company explained that in addition to the evidence pack, the panel can bring their own experiences to the assessment, investigate or mystery shop.
- k) A timeline was shared by The Company. The evidence pack will be shared with The Forum for signed by 1st March, with sign off (by exception) requested by 6th March. Forum members will be invited to the research debrief in May 2024.

10. AOB

- a) No additional items were raised.

Next meeting

21 Mar 2024 via Microsoft Teams

(Affordability & Vulnerability subgroup meeting: 13 Mar 2024)

Actions tracker -

February 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to provide an overview of queries received by subject matter.	Open
2	Circulate the slides which CCW presented	Open
3	CCW to provide further evidence on the ramped billing recommendation	Open
4	The Company to report back to The Forum with details of any independent observer and the criteria for the projects' inclusion [Working with Others PC]	Open
5	The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with The Forum [Working with Others PC]	Open
6	Add an Environment subgroup agenda item – deep dive Working with Others PC schemes, prioritised by spend	Open
7	The Company to share the evidence pack for Inclusive Customer Service with The Forum by 1 st March	Open
8	The Company to ask whether the research agency could share details of the expert panel directly with The Forum [Inclusive Customer Service PC]	Open

January 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	Get the Environment and Affordability & Vulnerability subgroups, along with production of the minutes for the monthly Forum meetings, back on track.	Closed
2	Minutes and papers for the monthly Forum meeting, as well as the subgroups, to be circulated at least 2 weeks beforehand.	In Progress
3	CCW to circulate details of overall research assessment to Forum members.	Closed
4	The Company to circulate the outcome of the Horizon Scanning with details of how this is going to feed into Customer Research and Business Planning.	Open

December 2023 - no meeting

November 2023

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to provide feedback on CCWs assessment of the PR24 plan.	Completed
2	The Company to consider what customer research will be presented to the A&V subgroup, the Environment subgroup. and will be brought to the main Forum meetings.	Completed
3	The A&V subgroup to be restarted in the new year	Closed
4	The Company to provide a copy of their annual customer research programme	Completed

October 2023

Ref.	Action	Status
2	Forum members to provide any feedback on the YWYS pre-reading materials; and to provide suggestions for improving their accessibility.	Completed
4	Forum members to comment on the YWYS draft presentation, once circulated in early November.	Completed

September 2023

Ref.	Action	Status
3	The Company to provide information about proportion of green measures (for waste water) in the final programme.	Completed