

**Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers  
Minutes of Meeting  
16 December 2024  
Microsoft Teams Meeting**

**Attendees:**

Chris Griffin	Independent Member
Dave Merrett	Independent Member
James Copeland	National Farmers Union
Jodie Hall	Citizens Advice
Kursh Siddique	Independent Member
Steve Grebby	Consumer Council for Water
Tom Keatley	Natural England

**Apologies:**

Fiona Morris	Environment Agency
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**Guests:**

Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Josh Clayton	Yorkshire Water
Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
Tom Greenwood	Yorkshire Water
Rachel Barnard	Yorkshire Water

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## 1. Minutes

- a) The minutes from November have recently been circulated to Forum members.

**Action 1:** Members to review minutes and advise of any issues or challenges by 17th January.

## 2. Actions

- a) Open and in-progress actions were reviewed.
- b) Actions from February:
  - i. *The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with the Forum [Working with Others PC].* The Company are commissioning a 6 capitals review to demonstrate the value generated across Yorkshire. This report will be a comprehensive external assessment of wider benefits and is due to be complete by March 2025 at which point it will be shared with the Forum. Remains **in progress**.
- c) Actions from April:
  - i. *The Company to source additional information on Ofwat's consultation relating to the Innovation Fund and share with the Forum.* Ofwat have updated that they intend to consult on this in future, but the specific detail has not been shared. Remains **open**.
- d) Actions from September:
  - i. *Complaint handling performance to be added to the next Forum, or next Affordability and Vulnerability subgroup.* On December's agenda. **Complete**.
  - ii. *Add Watermark report analysis to a future Forum meeting agenda.* To be added to January's agenda in order that a more thorough update can be provided. Currently **in progress**.
- e) Actions from November:
  - i. *The EA to investigate whether a pollution reporting performance industry comparison can be shared with Forum members, albeit recognising that this would represent unverified data.* Remains **open**.
  - ii. *The Company to share a graphical representation of the time to report potential pollution events, particularly where the 4-hour target has been missed.* **Open**.

- iii. *Forum members to consider the call for evidence and writing their own response in February 2025. **Open.***
- iv. *The Company to provide further updates to the Forum when further details about the Cunliffe review are known. **Open.***

f) New actions from December:

- i. **Action 1:** Members to review minutes and advise of any issues or challenges by 17<sup>th</sup> January.
- ii. **Action 2:** The Company to extend the January meeting by one hour to accommodate discussions on the revised agenda.
- iii. **Action 3:** The Company to provide a fuller report on serious pollution incidents for debate at the January meeting.
- iv. **Action 4:** The Company to share the analysis of the FD with the Forum ahead of the January meeting.
- v. **Action 5:** The Company to share the proposed Stage 2 questions [regional perceptions research] and share the results of Stage 1 by the end of January.
- vi. **Action 6:** The Company to provide an update on the impact of the new complaint-handling systems and processes in February 2025's meeting.
- vii. **Action 7:** The Company to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting.

### **3. Updates from the Chair**

- a) The Chair raised a concern about the significant increase in number of serious pollution incidents and strongly suggested discussing it in the main Forum meeting in January, due to its impact.
- b) In response to the raised concern, a Forum member mentioned that the Company would provide a comprehensive report on the pollution incidents at the next environment subgroup meeting in February. This report would include detailed analysis and potential solutions.
- c) The Chair suggested extending the January meeting duration by an hour to accommodate discussion on the agenda topics, including the report on serious pollution incidents. The Company and Forum members agreed upon it.
- d) The Company highlighted the evolving attitudes of the Customer Challenge Group (CCG) from ambivalent to more formalized and structured, as a significant development.
- e) To this, the Chair added the significance of Ofwat's decision to mandate CCG involvement in Performance Commitments (PCs), emphasising the need to

maintain momentum and provide future forum details. The Company and Forum members agreed to the same.

**Action 2:** The Company to extend the January meeting by one hour to accommodate discussions on the revised agenda.

**Action 3:** The Company to provide a fuller report on serious pollution incidents for debate at the January meeting.

#### **4. Update on Environment subgroup**

- a) The subgroup chair communicated the significant challenge of delivering two bathing water improvements by 2028, as discussed by the Company in the environment subgroup meeting. The tight timeline requires the Company to conduct investigations, develop solutions, and implement them within this period.
- b) The subgroup chair mentioned the potential for 14 serious pollution incidents this year had been highlighted, this would be the highest number in the last decade. The Company noted that December's data is pending and agreed to provide more detailed updates in the following meeting. The subgroup chair emphasised that the figure underscores a notably poor performance compared to previous years.
- c) The subgroup chair updated on the WINEP programme noting that this may fail to achieve amber status for PR24 actions as 14 out of 709 actions are not delivered. The Company explained the possible reason for this situation includes later-stage programming issues and evolving views on deliverable schemes. The Company added that some issues also emerged later that affected decisions on solutions requiring holistic measure versus treatment types.
- d) A subgroup member raised a concern regarding presenting the undelivered status actions to the customers. To this, the Company suggested to include the response in the next environment subgroup meeting.
- e) The subgroup chair highlighted the upcoming changes in storm overflow assessment triggers, reducing the current 60/40/20 incidents per annum to a stricter 30/20/10, which will pose a significant challenge for the Company.
- f) The subgroup chair discussed the development of the environment strategy, highlighting that the Company has received a significant number of responses from stakeholders, which presents a challenge in addressing the diverse range of views. To manage the feedback more effectively, the Company plans to

group stakeholder responses by topic to identify common themes and concerns.

- g) The subgroup chair added that there will be a further round of consultation in March, where the revised and updated strategy will be presented for additional feedback, emphasising on the importance of aligning the environment strategy with customer research to ensure that it meets customer expectations and needs.
- h) The subgroup chair summarised the Environment Performance Assessment presented at the subgroup by the Environment Agency (EA), noting that the Company is likely to receive an amber rating for pollution categories 1-3 but a red rating for major pollution incidents, indicating areas needing improvement.
- i) Regarding self-reporting improvements, the subgroup chair mentioned that the Company has significantly improved its self-reporting, with 70% of incidents now reported within the four-hour window, up from earlier in the year.
- j) It was highlighted that the EA plans to increase inspections of water companies from 4,000 to 10,000 per year, aiming for 100% measurement of storm overflows.
- k) The subgroup chair discussed the introduction of statutory requirements for pollution incident reduction plans and potential changes to the Environmental Performance Assessment (EPA) requirements that might provide challenges for the company due to tight deadlines.
- l) Regarding the Working With Others Performance Commitment, the subgroup chair reported on the Company's progress in delivering 31 partnership schemes against the 30 target for the AMP, and 16 against the 15 targeted for the final year. This highlighted the importance of monitoring delivery and ensuring transparency in performance information, particularly since partnership schemes are no longer a performance commitment in AMP8 and are assumed to be business as usual. A Social Value team has been introduced at the Company to undertake measurement of such schemes.
- m) The subgroup chair updated that the Wastewater Resource Management Plan (WRMP) had been presented and drought plans were discussed in the subgroup meeting, noting that the company has received clearance from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to publish the final version of the WRMP.
- n) A subgroup member noted that the Company could provide more information on individual SFOs on the monitoring website, similar to the industry website,

and suggested this would increase transparency and improve public understanding.

- o) The subgroup chair was asked whether the subgroup meetings are now meeting expectations. The subgroup chair replied that they were and that the increased level of transparency was appreciated. He noted that as part of the discussion on the Forum's future shape, a reduced timetable could now be considered, whilst recognising the volume of upcoming work.
- p) It was also recognised that the Company is finding value from the subgroup's contributions.

## **5. PR24 Update**

- a) The Company informed that Ofwat is still expected to publish the Final Determination (FD) on 19<sup>th</sup> December, at 7:00 AM on their website. The Company aims to analyse the FD to understand differences from the Draft Determination (DD) and areas where it has asked Ofwat to change its position. This analysis may take several days due to the detailed nature of the determinations. Moreover, the Company informed that it will have 60 days to decide whether to accept the FD or seek a redetermination from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).
- b) Once the FD is published, the Company plans to share customer-friendly summaries of the FD and its analysis with the Forum members ahead of the January meeting. The Company also noted that the internal governance has been set up to handle this process.
- c) A Forum member highlighted the challenges of a CMA escalation, including financial impacts on customers and impacts on delivering the challenging business plan. Further, the Forum member inquired about the continuation of works during any CMA process and the Forum's role during this time.
- d) To this, the Company acknowledged the significant resource diversion required for a CMA process and emphasised maintaining critical work to avoid delays, noting it could take up to 12 months and involve key personnel, affecting other projects.
- e) The Company mentioned the governance and preparations in place to enable a decision to be made on the FD.
- f) A Forum member noted that the original settlement was tight, with concerns from both the Forum and the Company. The Company further added that many of the same people are still involved from PR19 and that the process was tough for all stakeholders, stressing the importance of respectful communication and evidence-based requests.

**Action 4:** The Company to share the analysis of the FD with the Forum ahead of the January meeting.

## **6. Research update**

- a) The Company provided an update on the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) and Ofwat engagement event held on 27<sup>th</sup> November, which focused on PR24 engagement and collaborative research improvements for PR29. The event was held as an open forum and allowed participants to discuss the benefits and challenges of prescribed and collaborative research.
- b) A Forum member inquired about the continuation of these events in 2025 and whether Forum members would be invited to participate.
- c) The Company confirmed the continuation and suggested that forum members would have their own sessions with CCW and regulators. The Chair added that discussions are ongoing, but no firm details are available yet for the meetings in 2025.
- d) The Company provided an update on a light-touch study conducted to gauge customer thoughts on regulatory reforms following DEFRA's October paper. The study involved 233 customers, with 51% aware of the reforms and 85% supporting them, primarily to hold companies to account. The Company informed that the research report is available for Forum members' review.
- e) The Company also mentioned a regional understanding research initiative aimed at understanding customer perceptions at a local level. This initiative involves engaging with local authorities and running localised campaigns, one such has been tested in Leeds and focussed on a wastewater wetland project in Pudsey.
- f) The research aims to understand what customers love about their local area and then follow later with their perception about the Company without influencing their initial sentiments.
- g) A Forum member enquired about the scope of stage two of the survey and if questions would be circulated to the Forum beforehand. The Company confirmed that stage two would focus on local perceptions of the Company and local issues, and assured that the questions would be shared in advance.
- h) Another Forum member asked about the engaging with local authorities and consideration of other geographical areas. To this, the Company confirmed engagement with local authorities and mentioned ongoing partnerships, particularly around affordability. Furthermore, the Company acknowledged



the need to consider broader geographical areas and build on existing relationships.

- i) Another Forum member expressed concerns about scaling the pilot to different communities. The Company acknowledged the challenge but highlighted leveraging the extensive environmental program under PR24 and in AMP8 to engage impacted communities.
- j) A Forum member suggested engaging directly with community groups rather than local authorities to improve information quality and reach marginalised individuals. The Company appreciated the suggestion and noted that some capital schemes already involve community spaces to help customers understand local projects.
- k) Following a question, the Company updated that stage 1 of the regional survey is already in progress, with the second part planned for after Christmas 2024. A Forum member asked about the timeline for reviewing the proposed questions for stage 2, and the Company confirmed the availability within the next couple of weeks, with results expected by the end of January.

**Action 5:** The Company to share the proposed Stage 2 questions [regional perceptions research] and share the results of Stage 1 by the end of January.

## **7. Complaints-handling performance**

- a) The Company provided an overview of its complaints performance, highlighting areas where the Company is comparatively poor according to CCW's report. These areas include the total volume of complaints received and the handling of complaints, particularly stage two complaints and those escalated to CCW.
- b) In September 2024, CCW conducted an independent assessment of water's companies' complaint handling, sampling complaints across billing, clean water and wastewater. The Company mentioned that as a part of the assessment, CCW evaluated the process and the quality of customer communication and empathy shown by staff.
- c) The Company reported that CCW was impressed with the team's effectiveness despite high volume, the use of two-way texts and the autonomy given to case handlers.
- d) However, CCW identified areas for improvement, noting that the Company might be over-reporting complaints due to issues with interpreting the complaints guidance. As a result, CCW suggested reviewing the complaints

guidance due to the possibility of some complaints being double-counted or logged as new instead of a continuation of an existing complaint.

- e) As part of ongoing efforts to enhance complaints handling and customer satisfaction, the Company outlined priority actions based on the assessment. These include improving signposting to CCW in customer communications and addressing process improvements for accurate reporting. The Company noted it continues to collaborate with CCW to align on complaints guidance interpretation and improve communication clarity.
- f) The Chair expressed concerns that the high number of complaints reported by the Company may not solely be attributed to recording issues, but rather indicate a broader problem, irrespective of potential reporting inaccuracies. It was noted that the Company's 97.6 complaints per 10,000 customers compares to a median of around 30.
- g) The Company acknowledged that incorrect recording only accounts for a small proportion of complaints and went on to further address the additional volume.
- h) The Company observed a sudden increase in complaints from 40 to over 100 per month after December 2023. They identified a website change in December 2023 as the potential cause, which confused customers about the correct route for placing initial complaints, directing them to CCW instead of the Company. The website was subsequently changed in September 2023 to make the correct route clearer.
- i) The Company provided detailed insights into the increase in complaints, particularly related to sewer flooding, which has been the biggest area of concern. The Company also explained that there has been a slight increase in complaint numbers over the last couple of years across the industry, and specifically in Yorkshire.
- j) The Company identified sewer flooding as the primary driver of complaints, covering internal sewage flooding in homes, external sewage flooding around properties, and sewage leaks in other areas.
- k) To address the abovementioned issues, the Company has restructured its operations into geographic catchments, including the West, South and Northeast catchments. This restructuring allows for better coordination between the complaints team and technicians, leading to more effective and quicker resolutions for customers.
- l) Additionally, the Company has upgraded its CRM system from ICE, which had been in use since 2000, to Microsoft Dynamics. This upgrade aims to improve service delivery giving a holistic view through better mapping, leading to enhanced customer engagement and more efficient handling of complaints.

The new system is expected to facilitate value-driven conversations with customers, which were challenging with the older system.

- m) Improvements have already been seen quarter on quarter for wastewater, and the Q3 performance has improved compared to previous years in clean, albeit that significant incidents have impacted previous Q3s.
- n) The Company highlighted the reintroduction of Field Case Managers, a role that involves face-to-face engagement with customers. This role was reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic but has been recognised as essential in the last two years. The four new Field Case Managers have conducted around 150 site visits in the past two months, providing direct support to customers and addressing their concerns more effectively.
- o) Furthermore, the Company provided an update on plans to recruit additional customer management staff. From Q4, these staff members will focus on managing complaints related to sewer flooding and burst leaks, providing a tailored journey for affected customers. The Company aims to enhance communication and service delivery through these roles, ensuring that customers receive timely and relevant updates.
- p) The Chair enquired about the availability of a breakdown between customer service and operational failings in complaints. The Company explained that the current system lacks detailed insights but estimated that 70% of complaints are related to live operational issues, while 30% are due to dissatisfaction with issue-handling. It was noted that the new Dynamics system would provide better reporting and insights.
- q) The Chair emphasised the importance of understanding both the customer journey and operational outputs. To this, the Company acknowledged the difficulty in distinguishing between communication issues and operational failings but highlighted the ongoing efforts to improve communication and address operational problems within geographical zones.
- r) The Chair acknowledged that there is a diagnostic stage needed to understand complaints volumes, but raised concern that this delays action being taken to address issues. The resolution timeline was queried.
- s) To address the abovementioned concern, the Company explained that since the new system has already been put into place, any improvements can be expected in Q4, particularly in waste management. The Company also noted that while immediate reductions in complaints are unlikely, gradual improvements over the next 12 months is highly anticipated as the new model is implemented in both waste and clean water sectors.

- t) A Forum member noted that rising complaints are often due to asset failures, which impact customers. The Forum member then enquired about prioritising asset improvements in geographical areas with high complaint volumes.
- u) The Company explained that an escalation matrix has been deployed over the past 12 months to identify and prioritise areas with widespread issues and take proactive measures. Additionally, they implemented a customer risk register to assess asset-related risks and implement preventive actions to mitigate complaints, this may include tankering in times of heavy rainfall.
- v) The Forum member raised another concern about the Company ensuring that service levels for communities with fewer residents and therefore fewer complaints were maintained. It was also asked that the data supporting these decisions be made publicly available in a similar way to energy sector heatmapping.
- w) The Company responded that it aims to use existing technology to develop this capability, however, was unable to provide a detailed timeline for mapping. The Company also emphasised the importance of local area knowledge and proactive measures to ensure smaller communities receive adequate attention.
- x) The Company further explained that effectively handling smaller schemes allows it to tailor efforts while managing larger incidents, which typically generate more complaints. This approach helps improve the experience for smaller communities.
- y) Moving further, the Company discussed the C-MeX improvement initiatives, highlighting the development of a C-MeX plan based on feedback from a non-executive team member's review of a customer case. The plan includes expectation management, complex work escalation, field capacity and quality, and enabling high-performing teams.
- z) The Company added that the implemented measures include Customer Experience (CX) leads, proactive customer intervention triggers and clear definitions of complex work and escalation routes.
- aa) The Company also informed that the new model is anticipated to improve the C-MeX scores and reduce complaints.
- bb) The Company added that it reviewed its processes and internal culture following the CCW report which led to the introduction of complaints hubs, senior leader reviews of aged complaints (exceeding 4 weeks), and fortnightly executive deep dives into specific complaints. These actions ensure that each team addresses pain-points causing complaints.
- cc) The Company acknowledged that the current reviewing of complaints led to around 28 process changes across the organisation. These changes,

supported by executive backing, have significantly improved the Company's ability to address customer issues quickly and effectively.

- dd) A Forum member asked about next steps. The Company anticipates that next year will largely look to embed some changes into normal ways of working, and extending improvements from Waste into Clean. The changes already implemented in Billing and Waste will be launched in Clean from April 2025.
- ee) A Forum member enquired about the timeline for seeing the first full quarter of results following the implementation of the new systems. The Company clarified that required results are expected to be available by April or May, however, by February, the company could provide insights from customer satisfaction surveys and preliminary results from increased surveys and feedback.
- ff) A Forum member asked about the measurement of customers' satisfaction at the end of a complaint process. The Company explained it will largely be using existing CSAT surveys to measure this including follow-up on low CSAT scores.
- gg) The Chair asked whether insight from research project was also being used to understand customer satisfaction.
- hh) The Company confirmed that research has been undertaken on the change of process that has been rolled out. The research is still being processed and findings will be integrated as soon as practicable.
- ii) The Chair also proposed having a Forum representative attend the executive team meetings held every two weeks to gain insights into the process. The Company agreed to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting.

**Action 6:** The Company to provide an update on the impact of the new complaint-handling systems and processes in February 2025's meeting.

**Action 7:** The Company to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting.

## **8. AOB**

- a) It was noted that Awareness of Financial Support in the regular brand tracker survey has risen above 50% for the first time, achieving 51%.
- b) Awareness of Priority Services has also hit an all-time high in the tracker of 41%.



## Actions tracker –

### December 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	Members to review minutes and advise of any issues or challenges by 17 <sup>th</sup> January.	Open
2	The Company to extend the January meeting by one hour to accommodate discussions on the revised agenda.	Open
3	The Company to provide a fuller report on serious pollution incidents for debate at the January meeting.	Open
4	The Company to share the analysis of the FD with the Forum ahead of the January meeting.	Open
5	The Company to share the proposed Stage 2 questions [regional perceptions research] and share the results of Stage 1 by the end of January.	Open
6	The Company to provide an update on the impact of the new complaint-handling systems and processes in February 2025's meeting.	Open
7	The Company to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting.	Open

### November 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The EA to investigate whether a pollution reporting performance industry comparison can be shared with Forum members, albeit recognising that this would represent unverified data.	Open
2	The Company to share a graphical representation of the time to report potential pollution events, particularly where the 4-hour target has been missed.	Open
3	Forum members to consider the call for evidence and writing their own response in February 2025.	Open
4	The Company to provide further updates to the Forum when further details about the Cunliffe review are known.	Open
5		Open

### October 2024

All actions completed.

### September 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
2	Complaint handling performance to be added to the next Forum, or next Affordability and Vulnerability subgroup.	Complete
6	Add Watermark report analysis to a future Forum meeting agenda.	In progress

### August 2024

All actions completed.

### July 2024

All actions completed.

### June 2024

All actions completed.

### May 2024

All actions completed.

### April 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
2	The Company to source additional information on Ofwat's consultation relating to the Innovation Fund and share with the Forum.	Open

### March 2024

All actions completed.

### February 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
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5	The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with The Forum [Working with Others PC]	In progress
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**January 2024**

All actions completed.