

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
23 May 2024
Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Andrea Cook	Chair
Chris Griffin	Independent Member
Dave Merrett	Independent Member
Kursh Siddique	Independent Member
James Copeland	National Farmers Union
Jodie Hall	Citizens Advice
John Walker	Consumer Council for Water
Melissa Lockwood	Environment Agency
Steve Grebby	Consumer Council for Water

Apologies:

Tom Keatley	Natural England
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Guests:

Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water

Contents

1. Minutes.....	3
2. Actions	3
3. Update on Affordability & Vulnerability subgroup.....	5
4. Research update.....	6
5. Introduction to Imran Patel, Customer Experience Director	7
6. APR 2024, Service Commitment Plan and Quarterly Reporting.....	8
7. PR24 Business Plan Update.....	10
8. AOB.....	11
Actions tracker –	12
May 2024.....	12
April 2024.....	12
March 2024.....	13
February 2024.....	13
January 2024	13

1. Minutes

- a) Minutes from the April meeting have not been prepared and checked in time for circulation, due to technical challenges. These will be circulated to the Forum for review and approval offline.

2. Actions

- a) Open and in-progress actions were reviewed.
- b) Actions from January:
 - i. *The Company to circulate the outcome of the horizon scanning with details of how this will feed into Customer Research and Business Planning.* The Horizon Scanning report has been approved by the board and Simon Armistead will return to present this to the Forum. Remains **open**.
- c) Actions from February:
 - i. *Add an Environment subgroup agenda item – deep dive Working with Others PC schemes, prioritised by spend.* Added to the draft agenda as a standing item. **Open**.
 - ii. *The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with the Forum [Working with Others PC].* To be actioned after audit. **Open**.
- d) Actions from March:
 - i. *The Company to send the research for enhancement cases and cost adjustment claims for smart metering and water mains replacement.* Study is ongoing, delivery has been somewhat delayed by a need for improved regional representation. **Open**.
 - ii. *The Company to keep CCW updated on Period Products activity.* Following a suggestion from a Forum member, The Company has invited a range of external parties (including other water companies) to the debrief due at the end of June. The Forum will also be invited to the debrief. **Open**.
 - iii. *The Company to confirm whether there were any clean water initiatives to improve sustainability [Creating Value from Waste PC – redevelopment of land for housing].* The Company confirmed in an email to Forum members that water saving fittings were required as part of the commercial development. No grey water scheme requirements were required. **Complete**.

- iv. *Details of the newly proposed LORI schemes to be circulated to the Environment subgroup for consideration offline, with a view to approval.* Remains **open**.

e) Actions from April:

- i. *The Company to share details of how well represented vulnerable and financially vulnerable customers are in the online community research.* The Company shared that on joining, online community members are asked whether they are in vulnerable circumstances or receiving benefits. This question is not mandatory, but is often repeated within specific surveys. Respondents are also asked how easy it is to afford their household bills at present. From this, it is understood that around 44% of online community participants are vulnerable, with around 12% financially vulnerable. **Complete**.
- ii. *The Company to source additional information on Ofwat's consultation relating to the Innovation Fund and share with the Forum.* Remains **open**.
- iii. *The Company to update the Forum on GSS changes.* The Forum chair reiterated the need to be consulted on this. Remains **open**.
- iv. *Vulnerable customer strategy to be added to May and June agendas.* The Company advised that this will be circulated by email and brought to June's meeting. **Open**.

f) New actions for May:

- i. **Action 1:** Review detailed findings from the 2023 Water Matters report at a future Forum meeting.
- ii. **Action 2:** Further detail on the Company's approach to the Social tariff in AMP8 to be brought to a future meeting, specifically that some companies appear to have gone further.
- iii. **Action 3:** The Company to provide an update on its ambitions towards the eradication of water poverty.
- iv. **Action 4:** The Company to circulate details of the fish passage research on completion.
- v. **Action 5:** The Company to share a link to quarterly reporting on publication.
- vi. **Action 6:** The Forum chair to send draft content for the APR statement to the Company when ready, including reports from the two subgroups.

3. Update on Affordability & Vulnerability subgroup

- a) The Company updated on the PSR reach which seems to have increased predominantly as a result of data sharing between utility companies. The subgroup raised that this increases the responsibilities in the event of a major incident. The Company responded that it has been planning for this.
- b) The increase in numbers enrolled on the PSR has impacted on satisfaction levels as a result of more neutral opinion, rather than more dissatisfaction. This is likely to be as a result of those customers not yet experiencing the PSR benefits.
- c) The Company provided an update on the Inclusive Customer Service research and the subgroup chair shared the confidential list of participants with subgroup members.
- d) The Company shared details of pilots of the TellJo service, where customers are more routinely asked about their mental health via an SMS sent by an independent company. These pilot schemes are to be rolled out more broadly.
- e) The Company shared early work on scoping affordability and vulnerability offerings from other companies, and invited suggestions and feedback from the subgroup.
- f) The Water Matters 2023 report from CCW was shared, however as this had only just been received by the Company, available insight was limited. The Company are mid-pack generally. It is notable that satisfaction, particularly with sewerage services, has fallen markedly since the start of measurement (2014). The chair pointed out that satisfaction with 'company cleaning of waste water before releasing it back into the environment' fell from a high of 91% in 2015 to 40% in 2023 (current industry average is 36%).

Action 1: Review detailed findings from the 2023 Water Matters report at a future Forum meeting.

- g) A subgroup member highlighted the importance of customer engagement against this background.
- h) The Company shared that its own customer tracker shows reputation to be lower now than ever seen before.
- i) A subgroup member raised concerns that the Inclusive Customer Research didn't appear to include any representation from Bradford. It was discussed that the organisations were selected as they have a broad regional reach. The chair agreed this question should be put to the research agency.

j) As this is the 4th of 5 years research, this will be being refreshed next year at which point Forum members will be consulted on the approach. And if a participant drops out next year, they could be replaced with an inner city charity.

Action 2: Further detail on the Company's approach to the Social tariff in AMP8 to be brought to a future meeting, specifically that some companies appear to have gone further.

k) The Company explained that the research to evidence how much customers would be willing to support the social tariff has been re-run to improve confidence in the robustness of results. This now shows customers are willing to pay more than originally thought towards the social tariff. As a result, the data is being remodelled to understand to what extent we can make progress in eradicating water poverty.

l) A Forum member questioned the support levels in the rerun study. The Company provided detail to the Forum showing a high level of support for the proposed amount, with a majority supporting a far greater amount - more than twice the value initially requested.

m) A Forum member asked whether the commitment is to eradicate water poverty by 2030.

Action 3: The Company to provide an update on its ambitions towards the eradication of water poverty.

n) A Forum member noted that as water bills increase, challenges to affordability increase too; and that the targets being set by some water companies seem very difficult to achieve.

4. Research update

a) The Company updated on the projects underway including the cost adjustment claims and enhancement case research which support adjustments in the plan for regional differences such as greater proportions of cellared properties, more combined sewers and investment to counter these challenges.

b) Period products research has taken place, interest is high in attending the research debrief.

- c) Campaign testing research has shown that customers are not open to positive messages in advertising from the Company. Customers are interested in the specific, local detail of where money is being spent and on which projects. For the first time, customers outside of a region are also interested in what is happening there.
- d) The Vulnerability strategy is ongoing and will be tested with customers in an accessible version.
- e) The Environmental strategy will be being tested with customers and colleagues, as well as being brought to the Forum.
- f) Work is also underway to understand customers' opinions on fish passages.
- g) Preparations are also in place to retest revisions with customers following Draft Determination.
- h) A Forum member asked why there had been changes in customers' appetite for information on projects and spending outside their local area. The Company explained their hypothesis that in a time of such negative media, information about investments delivering wider environmental benefits is more appealing than no information at all. However, it is still recognised that if there is a local problem they want it fixed locally and now. Understanding of demographics is now being built into the capital investment scheme to better understand the needs of the area and how to best communicate with its residents.
- i) The Forum member replied that managing the need for increasingly local research alongside Ofwat's national approach is going to make triangulation more challenging.
- j) A Forum member raised interest in the fish passage research and whether this is on the Company's assets or other people's. The Company agreed to bring this information back to the Forum at a later stage in the research.

Action 4: The Company to circulate details of the fish passage research on completion.

- k) A Forum member commented that understanding the needs of customers in an area relating to a local project may then allow for engagement with those customers on broader issues, such as PSR.

5. Introduction to Imran Patel, Customer Experience Director

- a) Forum members and Imran Patel, the Company's new director of Customer Experience, introduced themselves and gave an overview of their experience.

- b) Imran explained his outlook on customer experience which he summarised in three words; Ease, Care and Value.
- i. Ease: taking the effort away from customers and making sure customers get a simple and consistent service through their channel of choice.
 - ii. Care: understand customers, and communities, and proactively help them when they need it most.
 - iii. Value: providing a consistent and reliable water supply, looking after the environment, supporting the economy and people of Yorkshire.
- c) A Forum member asked how the priorities explained will be balanced against work already done and the requirements of the regulators. The Company director replied that it is by including the ethos of ease, care and value across everything the Company does – which needs a cultural mindset shift. This means that when a customer needs it, the Company should prioritise the support it can give them.
- d) The Company explained their focus on understanding longstanding complaints better and that each fortnight a longstanding complaint is brought to the executive so that the CEO can dissect the complaint, understand the cause and implement learnings. A Forum member noted their support of this approach.
- e) The CX Director gave thanks to the Forum for their ongoing contributions.

6. APR 2024, Service Commitment Plan and Quarterly Reporting

- a) The Company provided an update on the **Service Commitment Plan** as communicated to Ofwat at the end of April.
- b) The Service Commitment Plan was required by Ofwat to articulate how the Company was going to deliver on the 7 Performance Commitments (PC) where Ofwat considered the Company to be lagging.
- i. Customer Satisfaction (C-Mex)
 - ii. Priority Services Register
 - iii. Drinking water quality compliance
 - iv. Per capita consumption
 - v. Water supply interruptions
 - vi. Mains repairs
 - vii. Internal sewer flooding
- c) Since the plan was published in November there have been quarterly updates to Ofwat in January and April detailing performance and progress against the actions intended to improve performance.

- d) In February and in May these updates were reviewed by the Company's regulators: Ofwat, the Environment Agency, DWI and Defra. This allows the Company to update on performance, and for the regulators to question the Company on areas of concern.
- e) The latest update gives the position at the end of Year 4 of the AMP. The Company recognise that this shows that there remain areas where performance needs to improve. Around half of the 44 PCs are expected to be met. This includes meeting around half of the common PCs which are of most interest to customers and Ofwat.
- f) This is in alignment with the position at the end of Year 3.
- g) Improvements have been seen in C-Mex, PSR Reach and Mains Repairs.
- h) Deterioration has been seen in Unplanned Outage and Pollution performance.
- i) Year 4 forecasts have been revised based on the latest information, which will also feed into PR24 plans. None of these are materially significant.
- j) 24 new actions have been added to the Service Commitment Plan since original publication in November. This is intended to show that the Company are serious about performance improvements and that work will be undertaken in Year 5 of AMP7 rather than waiting for AMP8.
- k) A Forum member raised that pollution incidents and self-reporting are of real concern. The sense they got from the regulators' meeting, which they also attended, was that challenges are mainly related to the total asset base and its capacity to cope with the demands of new regulation and climate change. They pointed out that it has been seen in the media that overflow numbers are rising substantially and despite it having been a very wet winter the expectation is that this will continue and that it will require a significant change in the way that companies operate.
- l) Another Forum member reiterated the scrutiny that companies will be under in terms of self-reporting.
- m) The Company agreed to send a link to Forum members when the quarterly reporting is published, which will be following finalisation of the Annual Performance Report (APR).

Action 5: The Company to share a link to quarterly reporting on publication.

- n) The Company then shared an overview of the **Annual Performance Report** (APR). This is the publication of performance information which covers the financial year 2023/24 being Year 4 of the current AMP.

- o) The document confirms whether the Company is operating within required allowances, provides information on performance against PCs and forecasts where PC performance will be at the end of AMP7.
- p) The document will be published by 15th July.
- q) The Company will return to the Forum in June, alongside their assurance providers, to provide the official out turn position.
- r) The Company reminded that, whilst it is not a specific requirement, it would value an annual statement showing how the Forum pushes the Company to improve, and documenting the valuable work done during the year. The Company asked whether the Forum would like to contribute a statement, which they would like to publish alongside the APR as in previous years although there is no specific deadline.
- s) The chair stated that the Forum would certainly like to provide a statement. They noted that this year's statement may be less positive because of pollution performance and although now addressed, the previous challenges working with the Company on the two subgroups. The statement is expected to be of similar length to last year. The chair would like the statement to attain the Crystal Mark for use of Plain English.
- t) The chair reiterated previous concerns about the limited size of the image library provided by the creative agency for use in the statement.
- u) A Forum member asked about the appetite for reintroducing separate sections for each of the subgroups as they are now meeting again. The subgroup chairs agreed that there had been sufficient meetings to warrant separate sections.
- v) The Company explained that in order for the statement to be prepared and copyedited by the creative agency alongside the APR document, a first draft would be needed by 7th June, which it recognised was short notice.
- w) A Forum member noted that finalisation will not be appropriate until after the APR is presented at the June meeting, adding that previously draft versions have required substantial rewrites once the details of the APR were known.
- x) A Forum member recommended that imagery is chosen which does not include rivers and waterways, favouring kitchen taps instead.

Action 6: The Forum chair to send draft content for the APR statement to the Company when ready, including reports from the two subgroups.

7. PR24 Business Plan Update

- a) The previous plans from Ofwat were for a 9 week consultation following publication of the Draft Determination (DD) on 12th June. A response would have been required by 14th August. Following the calling of a general election a pre-election period is now in place meaning government and governmental agencies are not able to make any major policy announcements.
- b) Ofwat remain unsure of when they will be able to provide an updated timetable taking the election into account.
- c) The Company is working to an expectation that the DD may be published the week following the election. This would represent a 4-week delay in the publication of the DD and, subsequently, the response date.
- d) The Forum chair asked if a comment from the Forum would be required around DD. The Company opined that the timescales will likely limit the opportunity for a Forum response, however when the timescales are finalised this will allow for the Forum to make their decision on responding to Ofwat's consultation.
- e) The Company expected that in July's meeting they would be in a position to update on the contents of the DD. A Forum member asked whether that was likely to take the form of an initial view from the Company about what the DD means and any points of contention. The Company responded that was very dependent on the dates and whether the Company would have had sufficient time to review the DD.
- f) The Company also explained that it is difficult to plan for a response without having seen the DD. The Forum member agreed that a rapid turnaround would be needed for all parties involved, and that knowing what the Company saw as issues would aid their own response.

8. AOB

- a) The Forum and the Company thanked Melissa Lockwood from EA for her fantastic contribution, and wished her very well for the future.

Actions tracker –

May 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	Review detailed findings from the 2023 Water Matters report at a future Forum meeting.	Open
2	Further detail on the Company's approach to the Social tariff in AMP8 to be brought to a future meeting, specifically that some companies appear to have gone further.	Open
3	The Company to provide an update on its ambitions towards the eradication of water poverty.	Open
4	The Company to circulate details of the fish passage research on completion.	Open
5	The Company to share a link to quarterly reporting on publication.	Open
6	The Forum chair to send draft content for the APR statement to the Company when ready, including reports from the two subgroups.	Open

April 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to share details of how well represented vulnerable and financially vulnerable customers are in the online community research.	Complete
2	The Company to source additional information on Ofwat's consultation relating to the Innovation Fund and share with the Forum.	Open
3	The Company to update the Forum on GSS changes.	Open
4	Vulnerable customer strategy to be added to May and June agendas.	Open

March 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to send the research for enhancement cases and cost adjustment claims for smart metering and water mains replacement.	Open
3	The Company to keep CCW updated on Period Products activity.	Open
5	The Company to confirm whether there were any clean water initiatives to improve sustainability, e.g. grey water use solutions or water saving fittings.	Open
7	Details of the newly proposed LORI schemes to be circulated to the Environment sub group for consideration offline, with a view to approval.	Open

February 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
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

January 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
2	Minutes and papers for the monthly Forum meeting, as well as the subgroups, to be circulated at least 1 week beforehand.	In Progress
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