

**Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
18th January 2024
Microsoft Teams Meeting**

Attendees:

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

Rachel Barnard	Yorkshire Water
----------------	-----------------

Apologies:

Tom Keatley	Natural England
-------------	-----------------

Guests:

Simon Armistead	Yorkshire Water
Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water

1. Minutes

Minutes from the last meeting, November, have not been completed by The Company. They will be circulated to the Forum for sign-off in the coming days.

Five months of outstanding minutes have been prepared by the previous minute-taker [Jan, Feb, Sep, Oct and Nov 2023] and will be circulated imminently. Future minutes will be with members two weeks before the next meeting.

2. Actions

- a) Open actions were reviewed.
- b) All previous meetings' actions have been completed or are in progress, except for:
 - i. *February 2023, action 10: Forum terms of reference.* The Company is aware this is still outstanding.
 - ii. *September, action 4: Company to provide information about proportion of green measures (for waste water) in the final programme:* Remains open and is still being followed up. The Company hope to provide an answer in February's meeting.
- c) The Forum highlighted concerns about the environmental subgroup meetings being cancelled and stated the February meeting, planned for 15th, must happen. The Company stated keenness for the meeting to take place as planned in February and to continue two-monthly following that.
- d) *New actions for January:*
 - i. **Action 1:** Get the Environment and Affordability & Vulnerability subgroups regularly meeting two monthly. The first meeting to take place before end March 2024. Bring production of the minutes for the monthly Forum meetings up to date.
 - ii. **Action 2:** Minutes and papers for the monthly Forum meeting, as well as the subgroups, to be circulated at least 1 week beforehand.
 - iii. **Action 3:** CCW to circulate details of overall research assessment to Forum members.
 - iv. **Action 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.

3. PR24 Business Plan update

- a) To summarise, 2nd October 2023 the Company submitted the PR24 Business Plan as a best and final plan, as per Ofwat instruction.
- b) 2024 milestones: December 2024 – Ofwat due to publish Final Determination. June 2024 Ofwat due to publish Draft Determination. There is some uncertainty about the date of the Draft Determination with unconfirmed expectation for 2nd week of June delivery.
- c) The Forum asked about the current flow of questions from Ofwat, the “outbound query process”. Questions are still sent every day at 3pm, with a response required within 48 hours. So far 143 queries have been responded to, mid-pack in terms of volume across companies. It is unclear when these daily questions will end, it is expected to be in a month or so.
- d) Preparations for Draft Determination are underway to prepare for assessing the Draft Determination objectively including strengthening the evidence; assessing confidence in delivering efficiencies; examining updated data.
- e) In December, The Company met with CCW to assess the use of customer research and prepare for providing its view of plan to Ofwat. CCW has assessed the research as Amber. A Forum member asked about the criteria for assessment. CCW used a criteria, but this was not published.

Action 3: CCW to circulate details of overall research assessment to Forum members.

4. Planning of Forum Engagement Topics

- a) The Company shared an initial forward agenda for 2024 agenda topics
 - i. PR24 remains a standing agenda item
 - ii. Customer Research will also be a standing agenda item
 - iii. The Annual Performance Report is prepared in July each year reporting on progress against key performance commitments. In readiness for this, and the Forum’s assurance, time is allocated more regularly at several points in the year.
 - iv. The quarterly reporting for Ofwat on key performance commitments will be brought to the Forum to raise awareness of the reporting; provide improved sight of how The Company is performing through the AMP and give opportunity for challenge.
 - v. Industry consultations will be brought twice a year to address the Forum’s appetite for seeing this more often.
- b) Updates from the environment and affordability & vulnerability subgroups will be brought to the subsequent Forum meeting.

- c) A Forum member raised that the Forum need to be aware of how raising of volume and noise to do with The Company will impact on customer engagement.
- d) A Forum member raised the importance of continuity across The Company over time and how this impacts on customers.
- e) The Company hoped the 10 year strategy should help with longer term continuity.
- f) A Forum member raised that the Draft Determination is likely to take up the majority of the June meeting, and questioned when there might be another Your Water, Your Say (YWYS) event. The Company explained that Ofwat is likely to host its own YWYS at some point in 2024. And that The Company is considering holding similar events independently of any regulatory requirement.
- g) A Forum member raised concerns with a lack of Board and Executive engagement with the Forum. The Company acknowledged this and updated that introductions to two new executives, Imran Patel (Director of Customer Experience) and John Thomas (Director of Strategy and Regulation), are on the agenda for the coming months.
- h) The Forum raised that customer communication is going to be a hot topic towards the end of the year, particularly with bill increases, and that this could be brought forward by media interest perhaps around Draft Determination.
- i) A Forum member mentioned the impact of financeability especially with Thames in the media. Additionally that customers and the media are interested in what shareholders and the executive get paid. The impact of cost shocks need to be proactively communicated to customers.

5. Customer Research Update

- a) The Company shared details of the forward programme for Customer Research in 2024.
- b) Key milestones are
 - i. PR24 milestones will be brought to The Forum throughout the year.
 - ii. June – Ofwat YWYS. It is as yet unknown how these will be conducted whether regional or national, and whether Ofwat will require support from companies to support these.
 - iii. June - CCW Affordability and Acceptability testing. The Company will be providing support for this research. This will follow Draft Determination so dates may vary.
- c) Other activities
 - i. Ongoing

1. domestic customer reputation tracker which covers satisfaction (with service, water and waste); perceptions; PSR awareness; communication engagement and awareness. Run monthly, 300 customers per month.
 2. PSR service satisfaction tracking. Twice annually.
 3. Inclusive service expert evaluation. Annually March/April.
- ii. Water Support Enhancement Plan Resubmission Run – comfortably secured £8 value in business plan. Debrief in February.
 - iii. Triangulation – set up for PR29 to build a solid triangulation database of customer research programmes.
 - iv. YW affordability and acceptability testing – as yet not confirmed
 - v. Draft Determination preparation including enhancement case activity; cost adjustment claims
 - vi. Ongoing bespoke research programme
 1. Horizon scanning
 2. Trade effluent customer satisfaction
 3. Your Water, Your Say (YWYS) customer feedback
 4. Reusable period products attitudes
- d) A Forum member asked whether the Company's YWYS research would only target people who had attended previous sessions. Extending this would help redress the balance between vocal, niche groups and the wider public. The Company agreed that it would be worth reaching beyond previous attendees.
- e) A Forum member stated that regular YWYS sessions, publicised at every customer touchpoint, could become the status quo for regular customer engagement.
- f) A Forum member expressed interest in understanding the drivers behind the trade effluent research as this is a commercial aspect and there are businesses with the retail aspect which are going to be changing.
- g) A Forum member asked what lessons have been learned from going to the CMA last time and whether there is preparatory work which can be undertaken. The Company raised that the Horizon Scanning, Enhancement Cases and Cost Adjustment Claims are designed to address this.
- h) The Company asked whether The Forum thought that the YWYS, and continuing with them, would be a good idea. A Forum member stated that there are several companies which already conduct continual sessions. Additionally that it would be good to move these sessions away from the "single issue" groups. The Company said that the senior team engaging with customers on our plans seems like the right idea. Overall, the Forum seemed to support the idea with the caveat that individual comments shouldn't be given disproportionate weight. A

Forum member explained how these sessions humanise the exec, but wondered whether different customer groups could be reached better by face-to-face sessions.

6. Horizon Scanning

- a) The Company wants to understand what are the emerging or enduring trends; what might that look like for Yorkshire Water; how can The Company get ahead of the curve and prepare now?
- b) Social / Economic trends identified –
 - i. Decrease in home ownership and increase in rentals in younger groups, led by increase in house prices. Increased transiency may affect customers' attitudes. Younger people moving out of more expensive cities as seen in York.
 - ii. Further reduction of savings and financial resilience
 - iii. Home working, hybrid and flexible working
 - iv. Higher employment contact (multiple jobs and overtime)
 - v. Life complexity including increased caring responsibilities. Legacy of the pandemic when we had increased visibility of people's homelives.
 - vi. Employers need to be flexible and sensitive to individuals' circumstances to recruit and retain staff.
- c) How the Company could get ahead of the curve –
 - i. Employers need to be flexible and sensitive to individuals' circumstances to recruit and retain staff.
 - ii. Investigate more flexible ways of paying, more frequent paydays, advances and low cost credit.
 - iii. Offering more convenient availability of engineering appointments, recognising not everyone is or can be at home during traditional hours.
- d) What would be the signs if things went well? Flexibility and adaptable for staff and customers.
- e) What would be the signs if things went badly? Lack of engagement, not listening to staff and customers, increased hostile customer sentiment
- f) Other issues identified –
 - i. Poverty – the national single social tariff isn't going ahead; social tariffs have historically been oversubscribed.
 - ii. General election – what will elected parties' policies be?
- g) A Forum member mentioned other changes in the workplace, notably the impact of AI and other digitalisation. The Company mentioned that digital

upskilling of colleagues has been discussed, as has IT security and malicious “deep fake” issues.

h) Environmental / social trends identified –

- i. Society ambitions embedded in The Company’s operations – which may lead to business opportunities or limit options. A Forum member identified that there will be restrictions in place e.g. on land use which don’t currently exist, and customers will likely value the environments differently.
 - ii. A greater local voice at odds with stronger national voice – a Forum member questioned how a balance will be sought when there are many more parties with differing direction e.g. more mayoral authorities.
 - iii. Heightened expectation of the private sector to deliver where public sector can’t.
 - iv. LURA (Levelling Up Bill) – phosphate and nitrate removal at source; less/more carbon intensive solution decisions driven, by law not choice.
 - v. Increase in mistrust – A Forum member agreed this is concerning, not only around transparency of data for environmental performance and executive pay, but also in terms of recruiting especially younger employees. It was called out that it is especially challenging to attract experts in e.g. nature-based solutions when those with an interest or specialism perhaps don’t want to work in the water industry with its current reputation for polluting. A Forum member raised the point that the industry can be criticised for its foreign investors while the public overlook that most people working in water companies live locally and aren’t deliberately polluting their local environment.
- i) A Forum member said that the exercise had been valuable in raising a range of different issues; and was keen to see how this develops and drives research and future business planning.

Action 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.

7. AOB

A Forum member reiterated the importance of getting documentation around at the agreed time.

Next meeting

22nd February 2024 via Microsoft Teams

Actions -

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.	Open
2	Minutes and papers for the monthly Forum meeting, as well as the subgroups, to be circulated at least 2 weeks beforehand.	Open
3	CCW to circulate details of overall research assessment to Forum members.	Open
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	Open
4	The Company to provide a copy of their annual customer research programme	Completed

October 2023

Ref.	Action	Status
1	A plan for Forum engagement and a critical path of activities to be produced and discussed at a future meeting.	Completed

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

September 2023

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