

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
17 April 2025
Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Chris Griffin	Independent Member
Dave Merrett	Independent Member
Fiona Morris	Environment Agency
James Copeland	National Farmers Union
Jodie Hall	Citizens Advice
Kursh Siddique	Independent Member

Apologies:

Steve Grebby	Consumer Council for Water
Tom Keatley	Natural England

Guests:

Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
Tim Sheer	Yorkshire Water
Emma Lay	Yorkshire Water
Darren Gorner	Yorkshire Water
Shahnaz Hussain	Yorkshire Water
Shona Goldthorpe	Yorkshire Water
Bob Simes	Yorkshire Water
Rachel Barnard	Yorkshire Water

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1. Minutes

- a) The minutes from March have not yet been provided for review. These will be circulated to Forum members for approval outside of the meeting, with comments requested by 30th April.

2. Actions

- a) Open and in-progress actions were reviewed.
- b) Actions from February 2024:
 - 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. The report will cover the period until the end of March 2025 and is expected to be ready mid-May. It will be shared with the Forum and added to June's agenda. Remains **in progress**.
- c) Actions from November 2024:
 - i. *The Company to share a graphical representation of the time to report potential pollution events, particularly where the 4-hour target has been missed.* The data for this should now have been received. Item on April's agenda. **Complete**.
 - ii. *The Company to finalise decisions about the future of the Forum.* **In progress**. A paper presenting recommendations for the future of the Forum has been submitted to directors. It includes plans to recruit a new chair, align with Customer Panels, and compare strategies to other companies' plans. No timeline for a response was given.
- d) Actions from December:
 - i. *The Company to share the proposed Stage 2 questions [regional perceptions research] and share the results of Stage 1 by the end of January.* As at April, this is still on hold. **In progress**.
 - ii. *The Company to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting where complaints deep-dives are undertaken.* Check feasibility of attending complaints related meetings. The Company updated that it continues to investigate the options for this. The action remains **in progress**.
 - iii. *How does the Forum better engage with the senior team at the Company.* Expected to form part of the decisions about the future of the Forum. Remains **in progress**.

e) Actions from February:

- i. *The Company to bring the investment plan reporting (as submitted to Ofwat) to May/June's meeting.* This will be provided to Ofwat in May and subsequently brought to the Forum twice yearly. Remains **in progress.**
- ii. *The Company provide a further update on complaints performance next quarter.* Added to May's agenda. **In progress.**
- iii. *Plans for performance improvement of sewer flooding to be brought to the Environment subgroup.* Discussed at April's Environment subgroup meeting. **Complete.**

f) Actions from March:

- i. *The Company to advise whether customers are being informed of delays to meter fitting requests.* On April's agenda. **Complete.**
- ii. *The Company to give further details on the issues around meter fitting as a result of bill increases at April's meeting.* On April's agenda. **Complete.**
- iii. *The Chair to propose the questions on the Cunliffe CfE that are most relevant to Forum members. Members to review and identify any other necessary areas.* **Complete.**
- iv. *The Company to confirm its timescales for response to the Cunliffe CfE and when a draft will be made available to Forum members.* The Company clarified that in addition to the proforma it will also submit a written report to the enquiry. **Complete.**
- v. *Ofwat redress package proposals to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda.* Discussed at April's Environment subgroup meeting. **Complete.**
- vi. *Company to address concerns regarding delayed project starts and develop a strategy to assure the Forum that such delays are not occurring.* For clarity, this action is being updated to *Company to provide an update on the operational transition to AMP8, addressing progress against plan and providing reassurance about any delays to project starts.* On May's agenda, **in progress.**
- vii. *Item to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda: EDM report for 2024 and the availability of EDM monitors.* **Complete.**

g) New actions from April

- i. **Action 1:** The Company to clarify whether the proforma response to the Cunliffe enquiry can be shared with members as well as the written report.

- ii. **Action 2:** The Company to bring details of areas where underperformance is forecast to the May meeting, including plans for communication to customers and regulators.
- iii. **Action 3:** The Company agreed to circulate details of the estimated metered bill ranges.

3. Update on Environmental Subgroup

- a) The Environmental Subgroup Chair provided an update on the recent subgroup meeting.
- b) The Company had provided an update on environmental performance including the Ofwat redress package agreed recently.
- c) Members received an update on the 2024 position and the reduction in average spills from 2023 was highlighted.
- d) The Company explained their rainfall normalisation calculation used to provide a more accurate comparison of performance across years. The subgroup suggested this data be published.
- e) The Company informed the subgroup that undertakings would mainly fund additional storm overflow improvements. The Chair questioned if this was merely investment the Company could have financed otherwise. The Company stated it partly was but emphasized the work would be completed faster, delivering benefits to customers sooner.
- f) Pollution performance monitoring was discussed with performance being noted as similar to last year.
- g) The Company is implementing new operating models, focusing on process and pumping areas needing improvement, and has initiated a performance assurance program.
- h) The subgroup were updated on the EPA performance which is predicted to be 2-star.
- i) The Company presented on sewer flooding improvements, highlighting significant investments in storm overflow systems and alarm installations. It reported a 44% success rate in identifying blockages before they cause flooding, based on these alarms which the Chair noted as a positive outcome.
- j) The subgroup discussed innovatory approaches to address long-standing sewer issues and the Company countered that whilst innovation can help, major capital investment is required to address some of the system's issues.
- k) The subgroup approved a change to the Biosecurity PC shifting from 100% of managers receiving training to focusing on high-risk team managers supporting their teams.
- l) The subgroup and Company discussed environmental aspects of the Cunliffe review including integrated planning across authorities and organisations involved in the water environment; political vs catchment boundaries; clarity of governmental vision and policy; trust in the regulatory system and the impact of regional decision making.

- m) The subgroup received an update on D-MeX. This measure of satisfaction with Developer Services is based equally on company performance in handling planning applications and on a survey of developers' opinions about the Company.
- n) This demonstrated that developers in the area are largely dissatisfied with the Company's services. The Company detailed its efforts in AMP8 to address this issue, including significant changes in services provided. Although these changes are costly, it is estimated that they will be funded by charges levied on developers. Developers endorse the higher costs due to the service improvements they finance.
- o) The subgroup asked for the Company to return in 12 months and provide an update.

4. Business Update

- a) The Company updated that it is now focussed on AMP8 delivery and addressing any areas where performance was previously lagging.
- b) Investment is being "front loaded" in some areas to deliver benefits for customers and the environment more quickly.
- c) A quarterly review process is being established to ensure delivery of benefits remains on track.
- d) The Company indicated that penalties are expected for Performance Commitments (PCs) and Outcome Delivery Incentives (ODIs) in the initial years of the AMP, but rewards are forecasted from year 3 onward. This will be seen in reporting through the AMP.
- e) A member asked which areas are likely to see underperformance and how this will be communicated to customers.

Action 2: The Company to bring details of areas where underperformance is forecast to the May meeting, including plans for communication to customers and regulators.

- f) The Company informed that the next quarterly performance update with Ofwat is scheduled for 6th June. This provides an opportunity for regulators to challenge companies on performance and for companies to respond.
- g) The Company updated that the CMA process has started for the 5 companies that have appealed their Ofwat final determinations. The process has been extended to 12 months as in PR19.

- h) The CMA has invited third parties to comment on the statements of case, with a deadline of June 22nd. The Company plans a brief submission. These will align with engagement with Ofwat and also submissions to the Cunliffe review.
- i) A member inquired if companies not appealing the CMA could contract services earlier for an advantage and whether appeals would delay Ofwat's decisions on Customer Forums' future.
- j) The Company responded that its interactions with Ofwat in areas such as quarterly reporting indicate that it is not being affected by other companies' appeals.

5. Research Update

- a) The Company updated that the debrief for the Inclusive Customer research programme is upcoming and that members have been invited.
- b) Early results indicate that the PC for Inclusive Customers has been met, despite a decline in this year's score.
- c) The new and improved online research community has been launched. Upcoming projects are expected to include views on investment in accessibility at recreation sites and reservoirs, smart metering and lead removal awareness.
- d) Outside of the community, a large piece of research will explore attitudes, behaviours and influences on water efficiency. It will investigate lifestyle factors and barriers to adoption, as well as the Company's role in promoting water-saving messages in the current low trust environment. The Company is particularly keen to engage with future Gen-Z customers, ethnic minorities and non-English speakers, and to better understand cultural and religious nuances. Financially and otherwise vulnerable customers will form another key audience.
- e) The Chair asked for clarification on the future of the Inclusive Service PC. The Company clarified that whilst the PC is ending, similar research is expected to continue and is likely to be driven by the Company's vulnerability strategy lead.
- f) The Chair noted that the Company could consider continuing the programme independently, considering the progress made over the past 5 years.
- g) The Company addressed comments on reservoir stocks. Smart metering and understanding water saving attitudes was therefore noted as pertinent.
- h) A member inquired whether the smart meter research would include studies on smart metering and energy consumption conducted by the energy industry as they believed there could be shared learning.

- i) The Company confirmed the research aimed to understand smart meter installation and whether My Account features motivated customers to reduce water usage.

6. Pollution events

- a) In November's Forum meeting, a member inquired about the extent to which the 4-hour target was being missed in pollution incidents where this window had not been achieved. The Company agreed to report back on this [Nov 2024, action 2].
- b) The Company presented the final figures for 2024 across all clean and waste pollution incidents, noting that 63% were self-reported within the agreed 4-hour period.
- c) In Q1 2024, only 30% of incidents were being reported within the 4-hour period. An enhanced process was implemented, resulting in significant improvement.
- d) The Company clarified that the 2% of cases reported in "over 100 hrs" were retrospective reports following data analysis.
- e) A graphic was shared showing the reduction in cases "reported by others" since Q1 2024. By comparison, the graph showed an uplift from Q2 onwards in the proportion of cases reported in under 4-hours, thereby meeting the target.
- f) Reporting to the Environment Agency (EA) has been sped up by submitting initial reports quickly and following up with detailed information later.
- g) The Company stated that its efforts to improve the speed of reporting are extending into 2025, working with the EA and refining the processes.
- h) The Company noted greater public interest in this area. Reports are now increasingly coming via apps such as those from the Rivers Trust.
- i) The Company is discussing a collaborative approach with the EA to ensure water companies are promptly informed. This coordination is crucial to managing information effectively and preventing issues from escalating due to disjointed reporting framework.
- j) The Company noted that in 2025 so far, reporting within the 4-hour period is at 82%, demonstrating continued improvement.
- k) At the end of 2024, self-reporting accounted for 78% of all incidents which is the best overall self-reporting figure for the Company since 2021.
- l) A member asked how the incident reporting data correlated with the Company's published spills data. They also asked whether the Company had noticed any patterns in customer feedback or whether there were efforts to help the public contextualise what they were seeing and reporting to improve the use of time and resources.

- m) The Company aims to leverage public interest by collaborating with communities and local trusts, enhancing education, and improving signage to encourage direct issue reporting.

7. Metering

- a) The Company shared an update on meter applications following annual billing.
- b) Most of the Company's customers already have a meter (around 1.4 million), but some customers remain on a fixed charge or "unmeasured" tariff. In February and March 700,000 unmeasured bills were issued as part of an annual process. This bill was around 30% higher than the previous year.
- c) The Company expected high contact after issuing this bill and had plans in place to support financially vulnerable customers as well as other customers who wanted to reduce their bill through use of a meter, however demand for meter fitting has significantly exceeded supply.
- d) At the point of annual bills being issued the number of plumbers available for meter installations was as standard, with additional resources ready to be allocated from smart meter installations if necessary. Ultimately, this has proved insufficient.
- e) In explanation, the Company explained that its community engagement efforts to promote metered charges, particularly where customers would benefit from them, have previously encountered a strong resistance with customers preferring the certainty of a fixed tariff over a variable charge.
- f) The Company also noted that, in the past, a saving of £150-£200 was required to persuade customers to switch to a meter. Currently, customers are requesting meters for savings of less than £100. This rise in water bill costs appears to have caused a significant shift in social acceptance towards metering.
- g) The Company explained that it is the reduction in the threshold saving required before customers request a meter that has resulted in a higher volume of meter requests than they had anticipated.
- h) The Company observed that customers were previously concerned about water meters affecting house prices and negative publicity around prepayment energy meters had influenced opinions on water metering. Now it sees strong advocacy on social media for metering.
- i) The Company also noted that there would usually be a spike in demand for meters around annual billing but when bills were no longer landing with customers requests for metering would significantly decrease. This year demand for meters is not slowing as it usually would.

- j) The Company shared a graph showing a “hockey stick curve” as the demand for meters changed suddenly from the lowest since 2020 to the nearing the highest.
- k) This escalation in demand for meters means the Company cannot arrange meter fitting appointments before late 2025, at times even December, due to constraints in resource.
- l) Due to the significant increase in demand for meters and the constraint in resource, the Company is unable to schedule meter fitting appointments before late 2025, and in some cases, not until December.
- m) New plumbers are being recruited to alleviate the challenge, this may mean that some appointments may be brought forward.
- n) The Company wants customers to benefit from metered charges quickly. Despite the Customer Charter’s protections, processes mean customers only receive these benefits once the meter is installed. For example, if a customer’s meter isn’t installed until December, they will be charged their full rateable value until then, at which point any overpayment will be resolved. This is because the process is around meters being fitted promptly.
- o) Following consultations with its Regulation, Legal and Billing teams as well as CCWater, the Company will transfer customers who have requested a meter but cannot have it installed within 90 days to estimated metered charges. This will be effective from 1st April.
- p) The estimated meter charge is calculated based on the number of occupants at a property. When the meter is fitted the customers will be billed based on consumption.
- q) Customers have the right, according to the Customer Charter, to be billed only on the standing charge if a meter is not installed within 90 days of request. The Company believes customers prefer immediate bill reductions. However, if a customer indicates they want to continue being billed based on rateable value and wait for adjustments until the meter is fitted, their choice will be respected and they will be returned to rateable value charges. It is expected that very few customers will request this option.
- r) The Company announced that it is recruiting additional temporary and permanent staff to process the work as well as assessing the process and gauging customer reaction.
- s) The Company pointed out that none of the issues related to fitting meters has been allowed to impact the support for customers who need a social tariff, those customers have received that support immediately.

- t) A member asked if customers who choose to wait and pay only the standing charge will be informed of the pros and cons. They noted that if customers later find they would have saved money with another option, it could lead to complaints. They also questioned how the Company underestimated the increase in requests, considering the current economic climate; and whether the delay was due to staff or equipment shortages.
- u) The Company responded that there is no shortage of meters, particularly since they were prepared for the smart meter exchange programme. They are short of resource, specifically plumbers. They shared their awareness, through cross-company forums, of at least two other companies who are implementing the same solution evidencing that they are not the only company in this situation.
- v) The Company provided additional explanations to reinforce its earlier points, highlighting the significant shift in customer sentiment regarding meters. As an example, it referenced previous initiatives where meters and plumbers were brought to customers' homes, offering immediate installation with potential savings of £200, yet customers declined the service. The Company reiterated that there has been a noticeable change in customer sentiment beyond what was reasonably anticipated.
- w) The member emphasised the potential negative impact on customer perception if retrospective calculations reveal that they could have saved more, particularly during periods of water resource constraints. The Company responded that based on customer calls, it is confident that these customers are in the minority and that most customers are currently more interested in immediate savings rather than the potential for greater savings later on.
- x) The Chair asked whether consideration had been made for customers where the estimated metered charges exceeds their actual usage. The Company acknowledged that a compromise was necessary to provide a quick solution, despite requiring significant resources. It indicated that delivering a more complex solution within an acceptable timeframe would not have been operationally feasible.

Action 3: The Company agreed to circulate details of the estimated metered bill ranges.

- y) The Chair asked if the demand for metering was a national trend. The Company further responded that Northern companies are affected by this rise in demand for metering, however Southern companies are compulsory metered so are not impacted.

- z) Further concerns about the way that the change is communicated to customers was raised and the Company confirmed that CCWater had been consulted on the change and will work with them to make sure communications to customers are transparent.
- aa) Following a question from a member, the Company explained the process for properties where a meter cannot be fitted. After a request, a survey is done before any appointment. If the survey finds that meter installation is impossible due to pipe work, the property is billed on a metered assessed charge, which is based on the usage of similar metered properties. This practice is standard in the industry.

8. Billing support community engagement

- a) Forum members decided to postpone this item until May in the interests of time.

9. AOB

- a) No further business was raised.

Actions tracker –

April 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to clarify whether the proforma response to the Cunliffe enquiry can be shared with members as well as the written report.	Open
2	The Company to bring details of areas where underperformance is forecast to the May meeting, including plans for communication to customers and regulators.	Open
3	The Company agreed to circulate details of the estimated metered bill ranges.	Open

March 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to advise whether customers are being informed of delays to meter fitting requests.	Open
2	The Company to give further details on the issues around meter fitting as a result of bill increases at April's meeting.	Open
3	The Chair to propose the questions that are most relevant to Forum members. Members to review and identify any other necessary areas.	Open
4	The Company to confirm its timescales for response to the Cunliffe CfE and when a draft will be made available to Forum members.	Open
5	Ofwat redress package proposals to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda.	Open
6	Company to provide an update on the operational transition to AMP8 addressing progress against plan and providing reassurance about any delays to project starts.	Open
7	Item to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda: EDM report for 2024 and the availability of EDM monitors.	Open

February 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to bring the investment plan reporting (as submitted to Ofwat) to May/June's meeting.	In progress
2	The Company to provide details of the Net Promoter Score calculation as used in the insight dashboarding; examples of specific anonymised complaints details and related scores to be provided for extra context.	Complete
3	The Company provide a further update on complaints performance next quarter.	In progress
4	The Company to share details of the Environmental Performance Assessment plan with members.	Complete
5	Plans for performance improvement of sewer flooding to be brought to the Environment subgroup.	In progress

January 2025

All actions completed.

December 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
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.	In progress
7	The Company to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting where complaints deep-dives are undertaken. Check feasibility of attending complaints related meetings.	In progress
8	How does the Forum better engage with the senior team at the Company	In progress

November 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
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.	In progress
3	Forum members to consider the call for evidence and writing their own response in February 2025.	Closed

4	The Company to provide further updates to the Forum when further details about the Cunliffe review are known.	Complete
5	The Company to finalise decisions about the future of the Forum.	In progress

October 2024

All actions completed.

September 2024

All actions completed.

August 2024

All actions completed.

July 2024

All actions completed.

June 2024

All actions completed.

May 2024

All actions completed.

April 2024

All actions completed.

March 2024

All actions completed.

February 2024

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