

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
15 May 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
Steve Grebby	Consumer Council for Water
Tom Keatley	Natural England

Guests:

Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Gabrielle Lockwood	Yorkshire Water
Kirstin Hutchinson	Yorkshire Water
Rachel Barnard	Yorkshire Water

Contents

1. Minutes.....	3
2. Actions	3
3. Update on Affordability and Vulnerability Subgroup.....	5
4. Business Update	6
5. Research Update.....	7
6. Transition to AMP8.....	8
7. Price Control Deliverables: delivery plan.....	9
8. AOB	11
Actions tracker –	13
May 2025.....	13
April 2025.....	13
March 2025.....	13
February 2025.....	13
January 2025	14
December 2024.....	14
November 2024.....	14
October 2024.....	14
September 2024	14
August 2024.....	14
July 2024.....	14
June 2024	14
May 2024.....	14
April 2024.....	15
March 2024.....	15
February 2024.....	15

1. Minutes

- a) The minutes from April have not yet been provided for review. These will be circulated to Forum members for approval outside of the meeting, with comments requested by 31st May.

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. Added to June's agenda. Remains **in progress**.
- c) Actions from November 2024:
 - i. *The Company to finalise decisions about the future of the Forum.* **In progress.** The recommendations paper has been reviewed by the directors of Customer Experience and Strategy & Regulation. They have requested clarification on the differences between panels and Customer Challenge Groups (CCGs), including their respective rules. Currently, there is no resolution, but the Company noted that progress is being made, while acknowledging that the AMP has already commenced.
- 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.* Stage 2 questions shared and feedback received. **Complete.**
 - ii. *The Company to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting where complaints deep-dives are undertaken.* Head of Service Operations to come to June meeting to meeting Forum members and discuss future engagement. **In progress.**
 - iii. *How does the Forum better engage with the senior team at the Company.* Will form part of the decisions about the future of the Forum. **Closed.**
- 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. On May's agenda.

Complete.

- ii. *The Company provide a further update on complaints performance next quarter.* Added to June's agenda. **In progress.**

f) Actions from March:

- i. *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, **complete.**

g) Actions from April:

- i. *The Company to clarify whether the proforma response to the Cunliffe enquiry can be shared with members as well as the written report.* **In progress.**
- ii. *The Company to bring details of areas where underperformance is forecast to the May meeting, including plans for communication to customers and regulators.* Documentation was shared with the Chair for circulation to members. **Complete.**
- iii. *The Company agreed to circulate details of the estimated metered bill ranges.* Awaiting data, remains **open.**

h) New actions from May

- i. **Action 1:** Company to answer whether the ground water levels in the East of the county are below normal levels for the time of year.
- ii. **Action 2:** Company to update subgroup chairs on when the PC/ODI results will be made available to them.

3. Update on Affordability and Vulnerability Subgroup

- a) The Affordability and Vulnerability subgroup Chair provided an update on the recent subgroup meeting.
- b) The Company presented to the subgroup on the huge demand for water meters as discussed in detail at April's Forum meeting.
- c) The performance of the Social tariff was judged to be good by the Chair. 204,000 customers will be supported in 2025/6 with bill reductions at 212,000. This is trending upwards from the previous year's figures.
- d) The Chair noted that although the Company is required to hit a PSR target of how many customers on PSR are attempted to be contacted each year, this is not a target that is a particularly effective method of determining the Company's PSR success. Moreso, PSR Reach or the effectiveness of the service delivered during an incident. However, the metric for PR19 was achieved.
- e) The subgroup reviewed domestic monthly tracker reports. This is a long running tracker project where 300 customers are interviewed by telephone every month. The interviewees are representative of the region in terms of age, location and other demographics.
- f) The tracker reports showed declines in perception, trust, and value for money. The decreases were most notable during the period when customers received their bills.
- g) It was noted that the declines in measures align to the period when bill rises were being announced.
- h) The increase in the number of customers on support schemes was discussed, as was the timing for a significant change in the number of customers being supported. This change is likely to be seen in coming months.
- i) It was noted by the Company that more customers than expected are eligible for the largest discounts. This will require a reforecast, however it is confident that sufficient provision has been made to support these customers.
- j) Awareness of financial support available has seen an uplift as a result of enhanced messaging including on the outside of envelopes, which is intended to improve visibility for those who do not open their bill.
- k) The Company provided detailed performance metrics regarding customers' attitudes towards their bills, noting that fewer respondents found the bills affordable and acceptable. However, there was no increase in the proportion of respondents expressing concern about paying their water bills. A member inquired whether this indicated that customers perceive the Company as more supportive than other utility sectors. The Company responded that the

actual monetary increase is less alarming than the percentage increase highlighted by media reports, which may be influencing perceptions. This unusual combination of factors will be investigated further.

- l) A member noted that the link between the monetary value of the increase and the proportional increase has led customers to scrutinize their bills more closely, making them more aware of the differences between metered and non-metered billing especially for high rateable value properties. This awareness has driven high demand for meters.
- m) The chair updated that the subgroup had received a presentation on the vulnerability strategy.
- n) The Company's strategy was received well by Ofwat although guidance was issued that the sector leaders' plans should be reviewed for further improvements.
- o) The subgroup Chair will be providing a short foreward for the Strategy document.
- p) The subgroup commended the Company's community engagement efforts around billing support. It was noted that the success rate was exceptionally high, with £81,000 in financial support provided and an increased awareness among customers with potential future needs.

4. Business Update

- a) The Company updated on the Water Resources situation.
- b) It noted that the region has had the driest Spring for 90 years.
- c) Between February and April, rainfall was only 41% of the long term average.
- d) As of mid-May, just 1% of the average rainfall has been recorded.
- e) As a result, the Environment Agency (EA) has declared a Prolonged Dry Weather status for Yorkshire. This follows similar declarations for Cumbria, Greater Manchester and the North East.
- f) The Company has escalated a response to plan for a worst-case scenario.
- g) Reservoir levels are at 68%, about 15 points below the seasonal average.
- h) Demand is also higher than expected, driven by the prolonged warm, dry weather.
- i) The Company has launched a communication programme of water saving messages across social media, audio and television.
- j) It has placed an increased focus on addressing leakage, notwithstanding the performance improvements achieved in recent years. 48 new staff members have been recruited specifically to address leakage issues, and an additional 28 employees have been seconded from other roles to join the leakage team. Further recruitment is underway.

- k) The water supply team are making use of the grid system.
- l) The Company is meeting regularly with the EA and reviewing river abstraction options, impacts and potential future permits.
- m) The Company is aiming to keep stakeholders informed on a fortnightly basis including Forum members.
- n) A member noted that the key messages including water reservoir levels are difficult to find on the Company's website. Another member added that the website's search function needs improvement more generally. The Company directed members to its [Water Situation report](#), but noted that there is a need to make this clearer and easier to find.
- o) The member questioned the reason for the increased demand and suggested focusing on areas with extensive garden watering for specific messaging. They noted the different motivations between residents in flats compared to customers in countryside houses with large gardens, where a financial incentive might be less effective, while an environmental message could potentially lead to a change in behaviour.
- p) They highlighted a significant issue where demand is surging in certain areas, and the movement of supplies does not address this problem.
- q) The Company is sending targeted messages, noting "stocks are low in your area" or "check your local reservoir" to places with especially low reservoir stocks.
- r) The member responded that this approach does not adequately address the issue of excessive usage by some individuals. This was previously observed in the South East, where owners of large properties habitually watered their gardens. This approach seeks to avoid seeming to place blame on customers who are already using water wisely.
- s) The member for the EA advocated for a risk based approach to permits.
- t) A member noted that while it is beneficial to have a grid for efficient water transport, it is also important for people to understand the consequences of their actions and emphasise the importance of using water wisely and conserving it. They mentioned future risks to supply that make the situation challenging. They felt it necessary to recognise this reality without causing undue concern.

Action 1: Company to answer whether the ground water levels in the East of the county are below normal levels for the time of year.

5. Research Update

- a) The Company updated on conversations with CCWater (CCW) about the future of consumer panels, as recommended by the Secretary of State.
- b) It now expects panels to consist of 50 real customers, led and managed by CCW with a research agency.
- c) The Forum, as the Independent Challenge Group (ICG), will have access to the consumer panels and related materials but no influence on membership or the content of their meetings.
- d) Pilots are expected to have run by January 2026 with rollout expected around April to June 2026. The Company is not one of the pilot companies.
- e) Defra will be funding the panels.
- f) CCW will be holding companies to account to respond to queries, questions or actions.
- g) CEOs and the executive will be expected to attend twice per year for an accountability session.
- h) The expectation from CCW is that the outcomes from the consumer panels will be triangulated with other research to ensure that the 50 members do not have disproportionate influence.

6. Transition to AMP8

- a) The Company stated that it has been planning for AMP8 for 18 months to ensure a good start.
- b) Teams have developed plans outlining the necessary resources, skills, and capabilities, along with their timelines, to achieve success.
- c) Plans have been created with cross-collaboration, efficiency and performance in mind and company-wide engagement has occurred.
- d) The Company aims to deliver efficiency and improved performance through assessing past learnings, managing change and engaging with colleagues, partners and customers.
- e) Delivery partners and people leaders at the Company attended events where the plans were presented and their roles were explained.
- f) The Company updated that plans are in place where it has identified that performance improvement and efficiency is required. Plans have been shaped by importance to customers and focus on outcomes.
- g) Delivery has already started in some areas. Mains renewal was highlighted and the Company noted that 8.9km of mains had been replaced to date against a plan of 2.5km in April and 10km in May.
- h) Recently the Company noted that it had been assessing which lead measures should be tracked in order to stay on plan.

- i) A member asked whether performance data could be shared with the Forum. The Company responded that it is working on enhanced tracking and measurement and would return to confirm what could be shared.
- j) The Chair expressed reassurance at the progress and plans to keep the Company on track. They emphasised the need for ongoing monitoring, including procurement processes and timelines, to align with the business plan. Regular updates and assessing necessary adjustments were also highlighted as crucial.
- k) The Company stated that necessary changes can be effectively made due to proper governance structures.
- l) A member asked what feedback had been received at the partner event, particularly in relation to increasing costs, resource constraints and skills shortages in the construction industry. The Company responded that it had anticipated price changes and accounted for the need for other adjustments.
- m) A member asked for reassurance that the procurement process is running smoothly and to time, and the Company confirmed that this a key area of its tracking.
- n) The Company stated it is focusing on key areas for tracking performance and building metrics to monitor specific achievements and enterprise-level factors, like procurement timescales and lead times. It emphasised the importance of proactively addressing any potential delays by closely observing these measures and maintaining control.
- o) In response to an enquiry regarding the initial major capital project, excluding mains renewal, the Company indicated that it would present Forum members with an overview of ongoing capital and strategic initiatives at a future meeting.
- p) It was proposed that the Forum should align with the reporting processes the Company is currently using and initiate deep-dives only when an issue is identified. Project delivery trackers and spend profiles were highlighted as useful.

7. Price Control Deliverables: delivery plan

- a) The Company stated that Price Control Deliverables (PCDs) offer an additional level of oversight for regulators, supplementing existing measures such as Outcome Delivery Incentives (ODIs).
- b) With the significant increase in enhancement investment available to companies, the Company stated it is important to ensure that these funds are properly safeguarded and used appropriately. The aim of PCDs is to ensure

that customers' money is protected and that commitments are fulfilled as outlined in enhancement funding plans.

- c) The Company explained if promised output is not delivered, the money is returned as a stimulus mechanism. There are rewards and penalties, similar to the ODI scheme. If deadlines are missed, time penalties apply. Missing an overall target results in full money return, while partial delivery involves partial clawback. It noted that the process is quite complex.
- d) The plan has been submitted to Ofwat. It aligns with the guidance provided in the Final Determination (FD) and incorporates the business planning and PR24 evidence.
- e) The Company also shared these documents with Forum members.
- f) This becomes the baseline from which the Company will monitor and report to Ofwat over the 5 year period.
- g) Progress will be reported back to Ofwat biannually, in October and May, alongside the Annual Performance Report (APR) in July.
- h) The new cycle requires preparation for extra reporting, with complexities involving the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) and the EA since the PCDs are a joint venture between the Company and those regulators.
- i) The delivery plan outlines outputs, allowed expenditures, and milestones for each PCD, which will be tracked over the next 5 years. Biannual reporting will detail whether the Company is delivering more for less cost, or vice versa. This will ensure accountability and that the Company remains on track.
- j) For specific PCDs, like those addressing storm overflows, Ofwat require detailed examination of timely delivery, costs, and expected outputs.
- k) Additionally, a RAG rating will start being reported to indicate progress.
- l) The Company offered that, in October, the Forum could be updated with a view of the plan at that time.
- m) The Company has assigned new reporting duties and established internal governance to ensure reliable service. Key PCD sponsors are collaborating with Capital Delivery to finalise the plan. These sponsors, based in Wastewater and Water, depend on Capital Delivery's outputs. Cross-business coordination ensures alignment and trust in the plan.
- n) The Company updated that Regulatory Finance has been supporting and ensuring that the allowance is accurate, verifying what the Company has received, and is determining how it integrates into the business planning process.
- o) A high level timeline was shared indicating that Ofwat will provide feedback by 30th May. By 15th July, the delivery plan must be published after undergoing independent assurance.

- p) Independent assurance is being provided by Atkins, working for Ofwat as well as the Company.
- q) The assurance framework change is likely to be to address other companies' reporting methods and approvals given to Ofwat with little evidence. This will enable Ofwat to investigate further if concerns arise.
- r) The Company anticipates that the impact will be limited due to the rigorous standards upheld over time and the consistency in its reporting practices.
- s) The Company called out the substantial efforts made to ensure the plans align with the FD or provide justification for any deviations, and to prepare for the July submission and 6-monthly reporting.
- t) The first year of PCD reporting is expected to require more effort than future years as requirements are finalised and communicated to companies and assurance providers by regulators.
- u) The Forum will be presented with the APR overview in June's meeting. An update on PCDs will also be provided at this time.
- v) A member inquired whether the Company could anticipate any additional reporting requirements from Ofwat. The Company replied that it anticipated extra specific reporting might be needed for areas mentioned in the FD where performance was lagging. For instance, regarding storm overflows, although performance measures for each Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) are not currently required, these may become necessary if the PCD fails to meet standards.
- w) In response to a member's question, the Company confirmed that the July reports would be published upon submission to Ofwat; however, the October reports will not be released. The Company expects that the report on performance will be more accessible to customers than the technical plan documents.
- x) A member asked whether it was known how Ofwat plan to evaluate the information and specifically whether they were expected to penalise every change, even when an alternative is provided. The Company responded that it does not yet know how necessary changes to the plan will be dealt with.
- y) It was noted that some of the presentation around PCDs and the delivery plan addresses some of the points made in item 6 'the Transition to AMP8' part of the meeting.

8. AOB

- a) The chair of the environment subgroup asked about when the APR PC/ODI results would be issued to them to aid in the preparation of Forum and subgroup statements. The Company said it would clarify timings.

Action 2: Company to update subgroup chairs on when the OC/ODI results will be made available to them.

- b) The Forum and the Company thanked Tom Keatley from Natural England for his fantastic contribution over a number of years, and wished him very well for the future. Tom is standing down with this his last meeting, and Natural England will put forward a replacement candidate for his position.

Actions tracker –

May 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
1	Company to answer whether the ground water levels in the East of the county are below normal levels for the time of year.	Open
2	Company to update subgroup chairs on when the PC/ODI results will be made available to them.	Open

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.	In progress
2	The Company to bring details of areas where underperformance is forecast to the May meeting, including plans for communication to customers and regulators.	Complete
3	The Company agreed to circulate details of the estimated metered bill ranges.	Open

March 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
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.	Complete

February 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to bring the investment plan reporting (as submitted to Ofwat) to May/June's meeting.	Complete
3	The Company provide a further update on complaints performance next quarter.	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.	Complete
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	Closed.

November 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
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