

2023 – 2024

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers

A statement from the Yorkshire
Forum for Water Customers on
Yorkshire Water's performance



How to view this document

Contents page

The contents page links out to every section within this document. Clicking on a specific section will instantly take you to it.

- 1 Click on the contents button to return to the contents page.
- 2 This button takes you to the previous page.
- 3 This button takes you to the next page.

There are also many other clickable links within this document which we've made easy to spot by [highlighting](#) and underlining them.

Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark does not apply to this page.

Accessibility matters.

It's really important that everyone can navigate and understand our Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers report, and what it means for them.

To help with this, we've taken steps to make sure this document supports accessibility needs:

- Screen readers will recite content in a logical order, as well as spotting headers and using different text for images.
- Compatible with text-to-speech programmes and Braille displays.
- Easy navigation with contents table and bookmarked links.
- Simple text structure with clear headings, paragraphs and tables.
- Comfortable colour contrasts.

Contents

About us04

Membership.....05

Statement from our Chairperson..... 10

Statement from the Affordability and Vulnerability Subgroup..... 11

Statement from the Environment Subgroup13



About us

We, the Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers, were set up in 2012. We are made up of key groups and independent members in Yorkshire who together represent Yorkshire Water's customers.

We make sure that Yorkshire Water fully consult you, to learn your views and priorities and deliver the services you want. We meet regularly to monitor Yorkshire Water's performance against the commitments the company made to customers (performance commitments) for 2020 to 2025 and make sure they involve us.

We are challenging and helping shape the commitments for the next five years, as part of the next five year billing cycle. Here water companies must set out how they intend to meet the priorities set by the regulator, and at what cost to the customer.

The current focus on pollution in our rivers and coasts will require investment at much higher levels than previous to meet customer's expectations. We know this will be challenging, and likely will mean the need for more bill rises even after this five year cycle.

We play a vital role in helping Ofwat (the industry regulator) monitor Yorkshire Water's business plans, and are responsible for:

- challenging how well the company involve customers;
- challenging how the company's business plans reflect your views and priorities;
- monitoring the company's progress against their performance commitments; and
- providing an independent evaluation of how well customers' priorities are reflected in the company's business plans.

For more information about us and our terms of reference, or to see the minutes from our meetings, please visit: yorkshirewater.com/about-us/yorkshire-forum-for-water-customers

Membership

Our Forum is made up of a number of customer and stakeholder representatives. Information about all of our members is set out below.

Tom Keatley

Senior Adviser Water and Land Use Natural England

Natural England is the Government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. It is sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and is responsible for making sure that England's natural environment, including its land, plants and animals, freshwater and marine environments, geology and soils are protected and improved.

About Tom

Tom is Natural England's Senior Adviser in Water and Land Use for the Yorkshire Area, with the lead responsibility for Ofwat's 2019 price review. He has a long-established overview of Natural England's work with us, which dates back over 10 years. He has helped champion the environmental benefits and public value of ecosystem services, to water companies, which aim to provide positive and affordable outcomes to society. Tom is a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and a chartered environmentalist. He aims, through the Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers, to create and strengthen relationships between us and the forum members to see how best we can contribute to the natural environment, while meeting the needs of customers.

Chris Griffin

Independent Member

Chris has worked throughout the charitable and voluntary sectors in Yorkshire and the East Midlands as a welfare benefits specialist and Deputy Chief Executive at Citizens Advice. Chris sits on the Forum as an independent member, with a particular interest in affordability and vulnerability where he chairs the Affordability and Vulnerability Subcommittee. Chris has more than 10 years' experience of welfare benefits policy, working to tackle poverty and discrimination. Chris is a trustee at a local Charity Centreplace, which offers support for children and young people around sexual orientation or gender identity. He is the Forum's Deputy Chair.

James Copeland

National Farmers Union

The NFU is the only organisation that champions all farmers and growers in England and Wales. They are here to give you a voice and protect your way of life now and in the future. The NFU's purpose is to champion British agriculture and horticulture, to campaign for a stable and sustainable future for British farmers and to secure the best possible deal for their members. Their strength is in their numbers. With more than 55,000 members, they are heard when it counts – locally, nationally and internationally. Every single member matters and makes the NFU stronger. A stronger NFU can be more influential, achieve more and give a more powerful and unified voice. Today, the NFU is the most successful representation body for agriculture and horticulture, with members covering two-thirds of the agricultural land in England and Wales.

James is the Environment and Land Use Adviser for NFU North (Yorkshire, Tyne & Wear, Northumberland, Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire). The role includes taking an overview on matters relating to managing land and the environment, including the availability of water, water quality, flood risk, land use, environmental schemes, planning, infrastructure, waste, climate change and adaptation. He works closely with all the Defra family (Natural England, Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation and the Forestry Commission), local authorities, commercial companies, parks, environment, non-government organisations and catchment partnerships (Working at the catchment level, this partnership is a group that works with key stakeholders to agree and deliver the strategic priorities for the catchment and to support the Environment Agency in developing an appropriate river-basin management plan, which is needed under the Water Framework Directive), to name but a few. He is passionate that agricultural businesses are given the opportunity to develop their business, and that the NFU lobbies for a landscape that allows this to happen, making sure that policy is rooted in the real world.

Kursh Siddique

CEO, BAME Voices

Kursh is CEO of BAME Voices and an independent member of the forum with an interest in marginalised public engagement, particularly in relations with affordability and vulnerability. He brings experience from the health and wellbeing sector where he sits on a number of different boards and forums in addition to this he is also a governor at the BTH NHS Foundation Trust. Kursh is working alongside national research organisations and universities to create public awareness and involvement in projects, with an aim to reduce health inequalities from within marginalised communities.

Dave Merrett

Independent Member

Dave acts as an independent member of the Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers, on which he previously represented local authorities in Yorkshire (2012 to 2015). Professionally, he is a chartered civil engineer and member of the Institution of Civil Engineers and of the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation. He is currently employed part-time by Amey Consulting and Rail as a principal engineer, working on Network Rail's 2019-2024 London North Eastern and East Midlands Bridge Assessment contract.

Dave's civil-engineering background gives him the experience to help examine Yorkshire Water's significant capital-investment programme. He also has considerable knowledge of transport, planning, environment and sustainability, flooding, policing, health and children's services and local-government issues generally. He had senior roles at York City Council, and its unitary successor authority (City of York Council), on which he served from 1982 to 2015, and again since 2023. Dave also served at different times on the Yorkshire & Humber Regional Assembly, the Local Government Association (he was Deputy Chair of the Environment & Regeneration Board), Yorkshire Regional Flood & Coastal Committee, with obvious crossovers to water-industry issues. Finally, he also brings ongoing experience of knocking on people's doors, listening to their concerns and problems – the pressures on their budgets, concerns about the risk of flooding, pollution, the environment and Climate Change – and has experience of working with disadvantaged communities and individuals.

Fiona Morris

Environment Agency

Member since 10 June 2024

replacing Melissa Lockwood.

The Environment Agency works to create better places for people and wildlife, and support sustainable development. They are one of the water companies' environmental regulators and one of the statutory members of all water companies' customer challenge groups (CCGs).

They use the opportunity of working with the Water Forum for Yorkshire Customers to review and challenge our next five-year plan so that we achieve the best possible outcomes for both customers and the environment.

Fiona has more than 30 years' experience in the Environment Agency in a range of roles, and is also a member of the Northumbrian Water Forum.

Jodie Hall

Environment Agency

Member since 10 June 2024

Jodie is an independent member of the Yorkshire Water Forum and has been working for Citizens Advice as a generalist advisor and energy champion for about 18 months. Jodie came to the organisation with a particular interest in affordability and vulnerability issues in our local and wider communities.

Steve Grebby

Policy Manager, CCW (Consumer Council for Water)

CCW is the independent organisation representing household and business customers across England and Wales. It was set up in 2005 to represent customers, including making sure their interests are at the heart of decision-making in the water industry. It works with customers to listen to their views, answer their enquiries and sort out their complaints about water companies.

It uses evidence from customer research, information from water companies, comparisons with other water companies, complaints and information on company performance, as well as feedback from household and business customers, to guide its work on behalf of all water customers. Its duty to vulnerable customers and the need for sustainable development (balancing economic, environmental and social responsibilities) supports all its activities. As well as its formal duties, it focuses on getting the balance right in the long term on affordability and making sure future water supplies and sewerage services are reliable and delivered to a high level of service.

There is a balance to be struck between the cost of bills now and the cost of bills for future generations. Steve began his career in the Water Industry in the early 1990's with the original consumer representative, Ofwat's Thames Customer Service Committee. Steve has over 30 years' experience of speaking up for water customers through his work with water and sewerage companies across England and Wales. He has worked on a wide range of consumer issues and now leads CCW's national work on all wastewater related issues including sewer flooding, storm overflows, drainage misconnections and misuse of sewers. He challenges their services from the customer's point of view and encourages them to put the customer at the centre of their plans and decision-making.

Statement from our Chairperson

Every five years, Ofwat, the regulator for the water industry, decides the level of services all customers can expect to get. This includes how much it will cost to keep services running efficiently including how much money should go to protecting the environment and meeting future water needs. A new feature of the Price Review for 2024 was the inclusion of virtual interactive public meetings with customers and other stakeholders called Your Water, Your Say. Each water and wastewater company held two meetings in spring and autumn 2023 where they were questioned and challenged about their business plans for 2025 to 2030.

Questions covered the service the company provides, its impact on the environment and what will happen to your water bill.

On 24 May, Ofwat announced that, because of the general election on Thursday, 4 July, and in line with Cabinet Office Guidance (general election guidance for civil servants), it was delaying the publication of the consultation on its draft price control determinations for the water sector from 12 June until Thursday, 11 July 2024.

Changes to other key dates on our PR24 timeline, as follows:

- The consultation on the PR24 draft determinations will be open for seven weeks and will close at 12 noon on 28 August 2024.
- Ofwat anticipates publication of the PR24 final determinations at 7am on 19 December 2024.

Statement from the Affordability and Vulnerability Subgroup

We had been disappointed that since 2021 we had not been able to access Yorkshire Water resources to facilitate the running of this subgroup. We have been encouraged by a recent sea-change in interaction with the company and the support of the Chief Executive and Head of Regulation to enable the regeneration of the subgroup.

Since its reintroduction in March 2024, the subgroup has met twice on a bi-monthly basis. Although still in early stages, we have been encouraged by the access available to us, and the early insight we've been given to decision processes to enable real and substantial engagement.

Our members are derived from the main Forum, and include our representative from the CCW, a representative from Citizens Advice, a representative with expertise in BAME representation, our Forum Chair and our Forum Deputy Chair.

The initial few meetings have primarily concentrated on customer research, in particular the work the company has conducted to determine what level of support customers were prepared to subsidise for other customers who could not afford their water bills. We're keenly aware that the price rises requested for the PR24 significantly increase the impetus of ensuring that support is available for those that cannot afford their water bills.

The Forum has been supportive of the company's ambition to exceed some requirements set by Ofwat. We are keenly aware that Ofwat methodology has caused some research to lack reach and proper representation. Ofwat mandated metrics of PR19 continue to be 'a little blunt' too; for instance, the measure of customer experience, CMEX, is an overly simplified insight into an area that is keenly important to customers. For this reason, our subgroup has endorsed and encouraged any attempt to go above and beyond and obtain a better understanding of customer priorities.


There have been encouraging improvements in the company's performance in the current Price Review period, PR19. The number of customers that Yorkshire Water has on the PSR (Priority Services Register) has increased to exceed their Performance Commitment, and Yorkshire Water's attempts to contact customers on this register to check and validate their changing service needs has too. The number of these attempts that succeeded in contacting a customer has fallen under target. Regardless, as we look at the water emergencies in other parts of the country, it's encouraging that Yorkshire Water is trending upwards in their registering of vulnerable customers, when it could be of critical importance during a local incident to know who needs enhanced and targeted help.

As we await notification of Ofwat's determination of Yorkshire Water's plan and billing for the next five years, we are interested in the future work on social tariffs by Yorkshire Water. The current system is somewhat confusing and 'crowded', and we're encouraged by the engagement we've had from Yorkshire Water so far. With bills expected to significantly increase, it's imperative that Yorkshire Water do not allow water bills to cause further hardship for those customers who are already struggling to afford everyday expenses.

Although in the early stages of our subgroup's renewal, we're left feeling encouraged after the initial meetings that we've had, and keen to engage further with Yorkshire Water. Alongside responding to Ofwat's draft determination, we also hope to continue our engagement with customer research and provide input into the production of a new social tariff.


Statement from the Environment Subgroup

The Environment subgroup has been re-established, and is working with Yorkshire Water, focusing on environmental aspects of the company's PR24 business plan submission and how it will to deliver it, as well as the company's operation and delivery against its current Asset Management Plan (AMP7) performance commitments.



Whilst disappointed that we were not able to meet and engage with the company during the production of the PR 24 business plan submission, we have resumed bi-monthly meetings from early this year with very helpful and open engagement by the company. At our first meeting we had a detailed exposition of the environmental aspects and implications of the Company's submitted plan, including the substantially increased £0.9 billion Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) and the large new Combined Sewer and Overflow investments (as part of the Governments Storm overflow discharge programme). Since then we have been made aware of the significance of additional guidance and changes from Ofwat that will affect the final form of the next business plan. We continue to test the balance of investments against customer views and challenged the company on key customer expectations of the programme.

We have also been briefed on the substantial changes in the latest iteration of the Water Resources Management Plans (WRMPs), which will require substantial investments to address projected increases in population, the impact of climate change, loss of the Severn Trent supply in the south west of Yorkshire Water's area, and the need to reduce groundwater and some river water abstraction. Likewise on the designation of further inland bathing waters and the consequential measures required to meet bathing water standards and periodic sewerage discharges.



Following a presentation on the company's performance, we have once again focused on the concerning increase in the number of serious pollution incidents and the company's outlier performance in self-reporting incidents in the recent past. Whilst there is a welcome and substantial reduction in more minor incidents past company assurances on reducing serious incidents have not been met – in fact they've increased. Some of these relate to the company's waste water treatment works (WWTWs), and we were concerned that in the on-going discussions on the company's business plan submission it has been suggested, at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)'s behest, that installation of 75% of the proposed new WWT overflow monitors should be deferred to AMP9. Given Yorkshire Water customers' concerns on pollution and the environment and the need for a clear picture as to what is happening to guide operational and investment decisions this appears a potentially retrograde move. Equipment failures reflecting past underinvestment were also a factor.

We were also concerned by the company's performance in meeting the EU bathing water directive requirements, with a significant drop in the number of beaches meeting it. The company has decided to accelerate and prioritise investments to address this issue albeit only by 2030.

We were pleased that the company gave us a heads up of its new (close to) real time sewerage outfall discharge website - Yorkshire Water - Storm Overflow Map (arcgis.com).

We recognise the major challenge for the company (and water industry generally) in terms of how it can address the significant investment demands in this area, and the impacts this will have on bills. We note the customer research around this issue showing support for addressing the issue whilst questioning who should be responsible for paying to address it. We also welcome Yorkshire Water's rapid early and significant start on tackling the worst offending overflows within the current AMP – we were impressed by the presentation we had on the programme, and the way challenges to delivering the programme were being overcome, and economies being negotiated with the supply chain. Lessons learnt were being fed into the latter part of the current programme and into planning the larger AMP8 CSO programme.

We have continued to monitor how Yorkshire Water (YW) is honouring its commitment to adopting a more holistic approach to tackling environmental challenges, including climate change, and using more economic and nature-based (rather than traditional chemical treatment-based) approaches, which a good majority of Yorkshire Water customers supported in customer research.

At our last meeting we looked into how well the company is delivering its Carbon reduction targets, and meeting customers' preference for measures that prioritise absolute reductions in carbon over offsetting measures.

We have also been kept well informed and consulted on proposed substitutions for some of the schemes in the company's AMP7 River Improvement programme in order to meet their performance commitment on length of river improved, seeking to ensure maximum benefit for the monies invested. Likewise on the company's upland peat bogs restoration work.

This short report cannot do justice to the depth of the discussions we have had at our meetings. We have sought to ensure customer concerns and priorities, as evidenced by the company's customer research and its response, inform our deliberations throughout.

We are very grateful and appreciative of the commitment of the company and particularly their staff to supporting the sub-group in its work, as I equally am of my colleagues on the sub-group and the expertise they bring to its deliberations. We'd particularly record our appreciation to one of our long serving members, Mellissa Lockwood, who represents the Environment Agency, who has just attended her last meeting. Melissa has brought enormous expertise, advice and challenge as required to our work over many years and will be sorely missed. We wish her a long and happy retirement.

Dave Merrett

Independent Forum Member

We have updated our website to show these new dates. Our website and draft determination documents will include instructions on how to submit your response to the consultation.

We recognise that the changes to the PR24 timetable present challenges to all parties, including ourselves. We appreciate efforts being made by companies, and other key stakeholders in the water sector, to adapt to this change in circumstances.

We also recognise the importance of not delaying the date for publication of our final determinations, unless necessary, given the scale of investment proposed for the PR24 period and the associated benefits to customers and the environment. Therefore, in our revised proposals we are anticipating that we will publish our PR24 final determinations on 19 December. However, we recognise that the timetable is tight and so we are exploring all available avenues for extending the backstop date that would allow Ofwat to issue PR24 final determinations no later than 31 January 2025, if required. This would involve a modification of existing licences: we are exploring the option of issuing a consultation on a licence modification, in parallel with that on our draft determinations.

Thank you

For more information,
please contact
theforum@yorkshirewater.co.uk

