

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
20 March 2025
Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Chris Griffin	Independent Member
Dave Merrett	Independent Member
Fiona Morris	Environment Agency
James Copeland	National Farmers Union
Kursh Siddique	Independent Member
Steve Grebby	Consumer Council for Water
Tom Keatley	Natural England

Apologies:

Jodie Hall	Citizens Advice
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Guests:

Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
Simon Armitstead	Yorkshire Water
Rachel Barnard	Yorkshire Water

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1. Minutes

- a) The minutes from February's meeting have been approved by Forum members and will be published.

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, at which point it will be shared with the Forum. Currently **in progress**.
- c) Actions from November:
 - 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 to be added to April's agenda. **In progress**.
 - ii. *Forum members to consider the call for evidence and writing their own response in February 2025.* Call for evidence now published. Cunliffe review on March's agenda. **Closed**.
 - iii. *The Company to provide further updates to the Forum when further details about the Cunliffe review are known.* On the agenda for March's meeting. **Complete**.
 - iv. *The Company to finalise decisions about the future of the Forum.* The Company updated that a paper is almost ready to be shared with the Board before finalising governance. Although a precise completion date has not been determined, the Company aims to establish a clear plan of action over the next couple of months. **In progress**. The Chair noted that other companies may already be further ahead in the process of recruiting new chairs etc.
- 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.* This remains 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. This 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. **In progress**.
- ii. *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.* The calculation was shared with members. Specific complaints details to be brought to the Forum with next quarter's update in May. **Complete**.
- iii. *The Company provide a further update on complaints performance next quarter.* Added to May's agenda. **In progress**.
- iv. *The Company to share details of the Environmental Performance Assessment plan with members.* This has been shared with members. **Complete**.
- v. *Plans for performance improvement of sewer flooding to be brought to the Environment subgroup.* Added to April's Environment subgroup agenda. A subgroup member reiterated the importance and timeliness of addressing this. It was agreed that the subgroup should consider whether this is subsequently brought back to the main Forum. **In progress**.
- vi. *Company to confirm what the D-MeX target is for AMP8 Target plan shared.* **Complete**.

f) New actions from March:

- i. **Action 1:** The Company to advise whether customers are being informed of delays to meter fitting requests.
- ii. **Action 2:** The Company to give further details on the issues around meter fitting as a result of bill increases at April's meeting.
- iii. **Action 3:** The Chair to propose the questions that are most relevant to Forum members. Members to review and identify any other necessary areas.

- iv. **Action 4:** The Company to confirm its timescales for response to the Cunliffe CfE and when a draft will be made available to Forum members.
- v. **Action 5:** Ofwat redress package proposals to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda.
- vi. **Action 6:** Company to address concerns regarding delayed project starts and develop a strategy to assure the Forum that such delays are not occurring.
- vii. **Action 7:** Item to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda: EDM report for 2024 and the availability of EDM monitors.

3. Update on Affordability and Vulnerability Subgroup

- a) The Affordability and Vulnerability Subgroup Chair provided an update on the recent subgroup meeting.
- b) The Chair highlighted the substantial amount by which requests for water meters has increased, 48% year on year. This means that there is currently a wait of 6 months for a water meter to be fitted.
- c) The Chair reported that the Social Tariff is ready with customers having already been moved on systems in readiness for 1st April.
- d) By 2030, the Company projects that 125,000 people annually will be being helped with bill reductions. The subgroup noted that this is an ambitious target.
- e) It was reported that the target for the Priority Services Register (PSR) of 10% reach will be achieved this year. Attempted contacts will also meet the target of 95%, data sharing across utility providers has increased the numbers registered.
- f) The subgroup noted that as the number of customers on the PSR increases so does the operational challenge of servicing these customers.
- g) According to figures shared with the subgroup by the Company, customers are very satisfied with the distribution of water in the event of an outage.
- h) The impact of wastewater incidents on PSR customers will be brought to the next subgroup meeting.
- i) The Company provided information about the Brew Bus initiative, where staff use the vehicle to visit communities experiencing low uptake of support services or facing deprivation to have informal conversations, serve tea, and give guidance on support packages. So far, customers have saved over £13,000 from discussions in the Brew Bus.
- j) A member asked about bill queries and meter applications and their effects on call waiting and calls failing to connect. They opined that this undermines credibility when customers are unable to ask for a meter to be fitted and then has to wait for an extended period to have a meter fitted.
- k) A member pointed out that meter applications have surged due to rising bills, leading to long telephone queues. They opined that this undermines credibility, as customers wait for 30 minutes or more, losing confidence in the Company's promise to assist them. They pointed out that for social tariffs like WaterSure, being on a meter is required to qualify. Protections in place mean customers benefit financially as they do not pay consumption charges during extended waits. They asked whether the Company could assure the Forum

that the queues will not prevent people from applying for the affordability tariffs.

- l) The Company responded that they hadn't expected so many customers to react to the higher bills by requesting a meter, since this hadn't been seen with previous price rises. It noted that all efforts were being made to service customers in a reasonable time, but also that customers' bills will reduce if the meter is not fitted within 3 months.
- m) The questioner countered that the Company should have anticipated a higher level of calls, and that customers' expectations need to be managed. They asked whether customers were being told overtly that meter fitting will be delayed, and that doing this should reduce complaints.

Action 1: The Company to advise whether customers are being informed of delays to meter fitting requests.

- n) The Company pointed out that it had proposed that customers drop to metered charges as soon as they asked for a meter to be fitted, but found that there was not the technology in place to support this.
- o) The member pointed out that Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS) payments will be required after 90 days but that customers would be paying higher bills for an extended time.
- p) Members agreed that a worked example provided alongside the policy online would be helpful to customers in understanding the likely impact on their bills.
- q) A member asked whether there was another option besides an affordability tariff and/or a meter, and whether the delay in fitting meters was being caused by a supply shortage of meters (regionally or nationally), or installation issues. They also asked for Forum members to be made aware of the scripting in use to manage customer expectations around delayed meter installation, and for reassurance that the 6 month delay wouldn't further extend.

Action 2: The Company to give further details on the issues around meter fitting as a result of bill increases at April's meeting.

4. PR24 Update

- a) The Company updated that Ofwat has referred 5 companies to the CMA. The CMA now has 6 months to consider the appeals.
- b) Thames Water is outside of this referral process due to a request for deferral.

- c) The Company is yet to decide how active it will be in this process.
- d) The Company noted that it is preparing to report on Price Control Deliverables (PCD) to Ofwat, setting out the measurement for the next 5 years.

5. Research Update

- a) The Company updated that the ISO22458 accreditation is being reassessed after having been achieved last year. The Company feels confident that this will also be given this year since no non-conformities have been identified.
- b) The Company announced that the online customer community is live for current participants, and a new recruitment drive will start in April.
- c) The Company's research team has additionally been providing support for the Cunliffe review efforts.
- d) Research on the approach to customer experience contained in the business plan, as well as a clean water journey research report has been shared with members.

6. Cunliffe review

- a) The Company provided an update on their Cunliffe review activities.
- b) The Cunliffe review is a government programme examining regulation of the water sector.
- c) The Company updated that it had responded to the questionnaire set in November
- d) The Call for Evidence (CfE) was released on 27th February and covers 73 questions.
- e) The Company held a series of workshops with internal colleagues covering different aspects of the review.
- f) The Company has established a working group that reports to a steering group made up of executive members. These groups have already met several times.
- g) Engagement has involved internal colleagues including subject matter experts, external stakeholders, the executive and the board.
- h) The Independent Water Commission (IWC) has established specific requirements for the Company's response. Even for free format open questions, the response must not exceed 500 words.
- i) The Company shared a diagram showing blockers and opportunities across policy, process, people, customers, measures and external factors noting elements it would like to keep.

- j) The CfE is 8 weeks long, running until 23rd April. In May, the National Audit Office will report on Water Regulation. The IWC will make its recommendations in June 2025. In Autumn 2025, a Government policy consultation will take place. Any legislation changes that happen will be in 2026, leading into the start of PR29 in mid-2027.
- k) The Company has said that there were a range of regulatory reforms that could be recommended to the Government. It described these as
- i. Government giving strong leadership to regulators, water companies and stakeholders by creating a new policy framework that defines strategic outcomes that need to be delivered in the public interest. This would balance competing demands and establish the appropriate trade-offs between different goals.
 - ii. Government producing a new overarching policy statement for the water sector that sets out how competing demands should be balanced in the public interest. The policy would be based on robust assessment of the cost and benefits of different options and provide clarity for regulators, companies and stakeholders on the strategic outcomes that need to be achieved and the timescales over which they should be delivered. An example given was a capital programme designed to manage an increase in water demand but that causes big carbon emissions. The Company noted that the 5 year AMP cycle may not allow for the more strategic step-change programmes that are in the national interest.
 - iii. Government directing the regulator to restore investor confidence in the predictability and stability of the sector. This would include the regulator setting out how it intends to achieve the triple-A rating for the sector.
 - iv. Aiming to reduce complexity and risk as far as possible based on a more company specific model of regulation. The example given was a recognition in sewer flooding of the greater proportion of cellared properties in the region compared to nationally.
 - v. Government directing regulators to support regional catchment partnerships in developing and delivering integrated water management plans that reflect local priorities.
 - vi. Duties to promote public confidence in the water sector by rebuilding trust and minimising risk and uncertainty.
 - vii. Government devising a clear roadmap for moving to a higher trust regulatory model where circumstances would support scaling back of regulatory oversight. This was explained as Ofwat having a more supervisory role and enhanced monitoring was highlighted.

- l) Overall, the Company noted that Government could take action to improve predictability, stability and coherence in the regulatory framework.
- m) The Company stated that it recognises that the industry also needs to change.
- n) The Company provided more detail on the regional catchment partnership element (bullet v).
 - i. The Company communicated the benefits of partnership working at a local and regional level.
 - ii. Local initiatives are those such as the Living with Water programme in Hull and Sir John Cunliffe has been invited to see that programme in person.
 - iii. Regional initiatives are those such as Water Resources North (WReN) where the Company works with Hartlepool and Northumbrian Water for the North East.
 - iv. The Company highlighted the leadership role that water companies can have at a catchment level in convening partners and stakeholders to develop integrated catchment plans.
 - v. The leadership catchment management role could be mandated to demonstrate engagement and consultation undertaken.
 - vi. Adopting this approach could rebuild trust at a local level.
- o) A member asked whether the Company thought that local authorities and other partners should be mandated to collaborate with water companies. The Company concurred with this suggestion.
- p) Another member noted the potential impact of increased devolution and combined authorities. They also noted an opportunity for better information sharing across local authorities and utility providers when new housing is being planned.
- q) A member noted the mismatch between the planning cycles of local authorities, which are currently one-year, and those of the water sector at 5 years. They highlighted that for strategic investments all parties should perhaps be working to a 10 year framework rather than a short term view. The Company concurred.
- r) Another member highlighted the importance of conveying the need for investor confidence without undermining public trust in companies' commitments to customers and the environment. They noted this would be a difficult message to balance but critical, since these requests would be in the public domain.
- s) The Company stated that they are taking part in a WaterUK initiative to identify common messages from across the industry. This aims to ensure that both regional interests and national concerns are fairly represented.

- t) A member asked whether the Company was asking for more collaboration across water companies. The Company agreed that this was already possible without requiring any changes, but agreed the importance of this.
- u) The Chair suggested that they circulate proposals for which questions Forum members should focus on.

Action 3: The Chair to propose the questions that are most relevant to Forum members. Members to review and identify any other necessary areas.

Action 4: The Company to confirm its timescales for response to the Cunliffe CfE and when a draft will be made available to Forum members.

7. AOB

- a) The Environment subgroup chair asked that an item is brought to their next meeting providing further details on the £40m redress package required by Ofwat.
- b) A member asked whether PR24 programmes are now in flight or whether it is still an interim period. The Company confirmed that lessons had been learned and that it aims hit the ground running this AMP.

Action 5: Ofwat redress package proposals to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda.

Action 6: Company to provide update on the operational transition to AMP8 addressing progress against plan and providing reassurance about any delays to project starts.

Action 7: Item to be added to the April Environment subgroup agenda: EDM report for 2024 and the availability of EDM monitors.

Actions tracker –

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 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