

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
17 July 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

Apologies:

Guests:

Tim Hawkins	Yorkshire Water
Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Hayley Parrish	Yorkshire Water
Katie Saunders	Yorkshire Water
Rachel Barnard	Yorkshire Water

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1. Minutes

- a) The minutes from June will be circulated to Forum members for feedback and approval outside of the meeting by 31st July.

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]. **Complete.***
- c) Actions from November 2024:
 - i. *The Company to finalise decisions about the future of the Forum. **In progress.*** With major changes anticipated after the Cunliffe review, a pause will be taken to clarify expectations before reviewing and updating the Forum's operations for AMP9.
- d) 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. **Complete.***
- e) Actions from June:
 - i. *The Company to respond on whether mains replacement plans have changed following issues in York (bursts in cast iron pipes within clay soil) and to explain why the Company had not previously addressed these issues, given that the risk was known. **In progress.***
 - ii. *The Company to provide any publicity plan for communication of the reasons for the bursts in York. **In progress.***
 - iii. *The Company to provide health and safety information about asbestos cement pipes, particularly relating to any issues involved in their replacement. **In progress.***
 - iv. *Further detailed reporting on complaints to be brought to July's meeting. Postponed to next meeting due to availability.*
 - v. *Company to share table detailing APR performance against targets. **Complete.***
- f) New actions from July:
 - i. **Action 1:** The Company provide an update in September or October on the regulatory landscape.

- ii. **Action 2:** The Company to provide a summary on the consultation about in-period adjustments.
- iii. **Action 3:** The Company to provide an update on pollution challenges at the next environment subgroup meeting following the Interim Report publication from the Environment Agency and the Pollution Incident Reduction Plan.
- iv. **Action 4:** The Company to share the recent Ofwat sewer flooding response submission with the Forum for review, focusing on response times and planned improvements, and present this information at August's meeting.
- v. **Action 5:** The Company to share details of the proportion of customers who find their bill unacceptable or responded neutrally to the Bill Affordability question.
- vi. **Action 6:** The Company to provide further details on the differences between metered and non-metered customers in terms of their media perceptions.
- vii. **Action 7:** Update on LORI AMP7 final position to be brought to the environment subgroup.

3. Business Update

- a) The Forum were joined by Tim Hawkins, Director of Strategy and Regulation.
- b) The Head of Regulation expressed his appreciation to Forum members for their support and constructive challenge over the past years, especially regarding PR24, as this marks his final meeting.
- c) The Company updated that the executive team recently discussed the future role of the Forum within the context of an evolving regulatory environment. During this meeting, it was evident that the Company values the Forum's contribution in offering challenge and oversight to ongoing initiatives from a customer perspective.
- d) The Company noted significant upcoming changes in the regulatory landscape, including the conclusion of the PR24 process, the Cunliffe review, and anticipated government response.
- e) The main point from the executive discussion was the need for more clarity on elements of the regulatory landscape before moving forward. The Company recognises the importance of reviewing the Forum's activities and revitalising it well ahead of the PR29 Price Review.
- f) With ongoing changes to the framework, the Company indicated its intention to seek greater clarity to ensure that the Forum remains aligned with the evolving landscape.
- g) The Company plans to determine next steps by September or October, aiming for calendar-year-end at the latest. The goal is to sustain the momentum from AMP8 and PR24 and keep the group engaged during the transition.
- h) The Chair agreed that maintaining momentum is essential to avoid reverting to the challenging situation of PR19.
- i) A Forum member supported the Chair's desire for swift progress once the Forum's format is set. They recognised recent efforts to revitalise the Forum and its subgroups, and stressed the subgroups' importance for customer engagement. They opined that the Forum still brings a valued local perspective to complement the proposed Customer Panels. The member emphasised the need for the Forum to act quickly upon reconvening and to clarify how the Company envisions its future role.
- j) The Company stated it is uncertain how next week's recommendations and the government's response will change things. Ideas such as increased local control over water regulation and greater company-customer engagement are linked to the Forum, which will remain significant as regulations evolve. Upcoming white papers and legislation may bring major regulatory changes.

While the impact on PR29 is still unclear, the Company emphasised that collaboration with the Forum will continue to be important.

- k) The Chair expressed appreciation for the guidance whilst looking forward to further details and they offered assistance as the situation develops.

Action 1: The Company provide an update in September or October on the regulatory landscape..

Update from private members' meeting

The Chair provided an update on the private members session, covering

- a) Consultation from Ofwat about in-period adjustments
- b) Pollution challenges
- c) Internal sewer flooding

Action 2: The Company to provide a summary on the consultation about in-period adjustments.

Action 3: The Company to provide an update on pollution challenges at the next environment subgroup meeting following the Interim Report publication from the Environment Agency and the Pollution Incident Reduction Plan.

Action 4: The Company to share the recent Ofwat sewer flooding response submission with the Forum for review, focusing on response times and planned improvements, and present this information at August's meeting.

4. Research Update

- a) The Company presented on their Brand Reputation Tracker. This is a long-standing tracker which has been running since 2002 and covers perceptions, trust and value for money.
- b) Each month a sample of 300 customers are interviewed via the telephone. This sample is representative of the customer base in terms of age, gender, region and sociodemographic group.
- c) The survey shows a downward trend over the last 12 months in all three areas; perceptions, trust and value for money.
- d) A slight recovery was seen in May's figures, and this is likely to be linked to an increased awareness of support for affordability and vulnerability.

- e) The Company noted that despite the hard work of their Brand and Communications team, this hasn't resulted in any improvement in perception or campaign awareness.
- f) Survey participants are asked the reason for their score and this breaks down into a range of reasons for a good score (never had any problems, happy with it, good service etc); neutral scores (I have no perception of YW) and negative scores (too expensive, unhappy with sewage dumping, poor reputation, too many leaks).
- g) A correlation is seen where customers with a higher awareness of financial assistance and other support services have a much better perception overall.
- h) The Company explained that, when asked, customers say they learned about financial support from their bills. Information is included on the back of the bill, on an inserted leaflet and on the outside of the envelope. The website is also quoted as a source of information about billing support.
- i) Bill affordability and acceptability is on a downward trend, despite seeing a small recovery in recent months.
- j) Over the last year, the proportion of customers who say they are concerned about paying their water bill is trending slightly upwards, however while in June this saw a drop, this isn't expected to reverse the overall trend.

Action 5: The Company to share details of the proportion of customers who find their bill unacceptable or responded neutrally to the Bill Affordability question.

- k) The Company shared the outcome of a research study looking into customers' perceptions of media.
- l) Customers were initially asked about their perceptions of the Company.
 - i. 37% replied positively, 16% negatively, and 44% were neutral.
 - ii. Metered customers are more positive about the Company, as are the ABC1 sociodemographic group and those who said they find the Company trustworthy. Older customers, those over 55, are likely to be less positive about the Company.
 - iii. Media consumption and an increase in negative news stories are contributing to the negative perception in older customers.
- m) Customers were then shown a range of media stories and TV reports. Half of the material shown was positive and half negative. Participants were then asked what the story or article had done to their perception of the Company.

- n) After seeing the balanced range of media, the proportion of respondents who would speak negatively about the Company grew from 16% to 40%. Recall for the negative stories was far greater than for the positive media.
 - o) The Company subsequently shared research, undertaken in June, into weather awareness and their messages around water saving.
 - p) 206 customers were surveyed via the online community message board. This community is thought to be representative of the customer base, although acknowledged to be somewhat better informed.
 - q) When asked how to best describe this year's spring weather, although 84% said it has been drier than previous years, 6% think it has been wetter and 7% that it has been the same as previous years.
 - r) 60% of participants expressed concern about the spring weather, citing issues like poor crop growth and fears of a hosepipe ban. Meanwhile, 14% were unconcerned, believing reservoir reserves are sufficient and expecting wetter conditions ahead.
 - s) Participants were then asked whether low water stocks impact the environment. 94% of customers agreed that reduced water stocks impact the environment either a little or a lot. 77% of respondents went on to say that there are long-term environmental impacts of reduced water stocks.
 - t) Impacts noted included danger to water habitats and wildlife; declining river and lake flows; reduced volumes of crops harvested; loss of soil quality and others. Although some acknowledged damage to infrastructure and increased energy usage and emissions when treating the water this was at a much lower level.
 - u) 64% of respondents said that they have made some changes to reduce their water use, but this is on a small scale such as only filling the kettle as much as needed and turning off taps when brushing teeth.
 - v) Some short videos were then tested, these messages designed for social media are part of the "red messaging" suite implemented during significant dry weather.
 - w) 89% of respondents agreed that the messages convey that the current dry period is very severe, and that the tone was about right. Those with higher water bills were noted as being more neutral towards the message.
 - x) After viewing the ad, respondents most frequently planned to use less water at home, turn off hosepipes, and encourage friends or family to reduce their water usage.
 - y) When asked about further efforts to conserve water, most respondents (87%) indicated they believed they were already taking appropriate measures.
- Additional feedback included concerns about Yorkshire Water's environmental

performance, recent bill increases, and the necessity of their current water usage for health and wellbeing.

- z) The Company plans to collaborate with its Social Media, Brand, and Communications teams to apply these insights, ensuring that messaging is both effective and considerate of concerns regarding services and costs.
- aa) The group discussed whether metered customers' sense of "I pay for it, I'll use it" affects their water-saving habits. It was observed that companies with fewer metered customers had previously managed to encourage enough conservation to avoid further action, while others with more metered customers saw less effect from similar appeals.
- bb) The reality of customers' efforts to save water was also noted as being different to their perceptions of what they do or would do to save water.

Action 6: The Company to provide further details on the differences between metered and non-metered customers in terms of their media perceptions.

5. Update on Affordability and Vulnerability subgroup

- a) The subgroup chair provided an update on the recent meeting, which included Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS) changes, an operational update and an further information on the TellJo programme.
- b) The subgroup Chair said that the Company continues to track significantly above their target for the bill support that they are giving to customers. This aligns with the high awareness of schemes previously discussed.
- c) Priority Services Register (PSR) measures are performing well, with steady numbers for customer sign-ups, status checks, and contact attempts. However, the group observed that these broad measures may not accurately capture what matters most to customers.
- d) The subgroup chair updated that a single social tariff is once again on the agenda after the change of government. It was also noted that the government's deadlines for this, April 2026, does not align with the complexity of the required change.
- e) TellJo is a support service which customers are directed to when they ask for extra support. It works through what they are experiencing and provides potential solutions. Numbers of people being offered support through this scheme are significant.
- f) The scheme identifies that customers' primary financial concerns are housing, childcare and energy bills. well. The subgroup chair was encouraged that the

Company is considering broader support beyond just water bills, as these tend to be less significant expenses compared to other major costs faced.

- g) The GSS provides a response to customers when a service commitment has not been met. The subgroup Chair noted that while the legislative changes to the GSS have been published, the implementation process remains unclear. The Company will present back to the subgroup when the impact on customers become more clear.

6. Working With Others (WWO) Performance Commitment (PC) - benefits

- a) The Company presented a report detailing the benefits and lessons learned from working with others.
- b) The WWO PC was introduced in AMP6 to encourage partnership working across the business. As this has now been ingrained into business as usual the PC has been retired and will not be included in AMP8.
- c) The PC was met in AMP7 surpassing the target of 45 projects by one.
- d) A report was produced by the Company detailing the benefits of the 46 projects included in the PC. Other partnership projects were also completed outside of the PC.
- e) River restoration and health, as well as habitat restoration and biodiversity, represented the primary categories of projects. Other categories, including flood risk management, had a smaller number of projects; however, these projects were typically larger in scale and lasted longer.
- f) Each page on the report details a project including the collaborative partners involved and their contribution, the Company's contribution, an overview of the project, and its completion date. The value of partnership working is also detailed for each project.
- g) Each project considered quantifiable benefits such as volunteer hours and hectares of habitat improved, alongside qualitative benefits like gaining access to specialist knowledge or improving relationships with local communities.
- h) All the benefits detailed in the report have been formally audited.
- i) The Company noted some additional benefits gained from the 46 projects as
 - i. 292 hectares of habitat improved
 - ii. £18m in partnership funding
 - iii. 791 people trained or upskills in the Company, partners and communities
 - iv. 16 projects creating new data and insights
- j) The report, containing further details, was shared with members.

- k) A Forum member inquired about whether the Company could work with developers to help them assess the broader impacts of SUDS schemes and other nature-based solutions.
- l) Another member highlighted the importance of assessing the effectiveness of initiatives by evaluating improvements in the quality of the local environment for the community, as reflected by factors such as increased usage and a decrease in antisocial behaviours. The Company stated that its community engagement and environmental improvements at Ardsley reservoir have helped reduce antisocial behaviour, as more people now use the area responsibly.

7. AOB

- a) The environment subgroup chair inquired about the reason for missing the Length of River Improved (LORI) target by a significant margin, noting that the subgroup had participated in approving schemes intended to address only a minor shortfall toward the end of the AMP.

Action 7: Update on LORI AMP7 final position to be brought to the environment subgroup.

- b) A Forum member asked what was being done by the Company with the pledges made by customers at the Great Yorkshire Show. The Company responded that these were being collated and would be used to drive customer messaging.
- c) The Chair asked about the ongoing activity of the Brew Bus. The Company explained that this was a pilot and its success is being assessed, whilst noting that the efforts are now being directed on Temporary Usage Bans (TUBs) with more than 80 events being attended during late July and August.
- d) Your Yorkshire Water, Your Say events are planned for November. Four regional events are planned across the region.
- e) Forum members and the Company thanked Richard Hepburn for his contribution to the Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers over the last few years, noting the improvements made to collaboration and the overall positive impact he has made. Members wished him well for future endeavours.

Actions tracker –

July 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company provide an update in September or October on the regulatory landscape.	Open
2	Dan Chubb to provide a summary on the consultation about in-period adjustments.	Open
3	The Company to provide an update on pollution challenges at the next environment subgroup meeting following the Interim Report publication from the Environment Agency and the Pollution Incident Reduction Plan.	Open
4	The Company to share the recent Ofwat sewer flooding response submission with the Forum for review, focusing on response times and planned improvements, and present this information at August's meeting.	Open
5	The Company to share details of the proportion of customers who find their bill unacceptable or responded neutrally to the Bill Affordability question.	Open
6	The Company to provide further details on the differences between metered and non-metered customers in terms of their media perceptions.	Open
7	Update on LORI AMP7 final position to be brought to the environment subgroup.	Open

June 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to respond on whether mains replacement plans have changed following issues in York (bursts in cast iron pipes within clay soil) and to explain why the Company had not previously addressed these issues, given that the risk was known.	Open
2	The Company to provide any publicity plan for communication of the reasons for the bursts in York.	Open

3	The Company to provide health and safety information about asbestos cement pipes, particularly relating to any issues involved in their replacement.	Open
4	Further detailed reporting on complaints to be brought to July's meeting.	Open

May 2025

All actions completed.

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

March 2025

All actions completed.

February 2025

All actions completed.

January 2025

All actions completed.

December 2024

All actions completed.

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