

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
17 September 2020
Teams call

Attendees:

Andrea Cook	Chair
Chris Griffin	Independent Member
Dave Merrett	Independent Member
James Copeland	National Farmers Union
Janine Shackleton	Consumer Council for Water
Melissa Lockwood	Environmental Agency
Steve Foers	Citizens Advice
Kirstin Hutchinson	Yorkshire Water
Sumayya Mahmood	Yorkshire Water
Wendy Kimpton	Yorkshire Water

Guests:

Ez Chowdhury	Yorkshire Water (in part)
Ian Jones	Yorkshire Water (in part)
Joanne Dixon	Yorkshire Water (in part)
Paul Chapman	Yorkshire Water (in part)
Phillip Blaen	Yorkshire Water (in part)
Polly Hardy	Yorkshire Water (in part)

Apologies:

Pam Warhurst	Pennine Prospect
Tom Keatley	Natural England (in part)

1) Welcome

- a) Members were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were noted.
- b) The Chair of the Forum advised that members had discussed the customer complaint in their private session and wished to discuss this in detail in the main meeting.

2) Minutes and actions of the last meeting

- a) The Forum advised they would like to add additions to the CMA update from the July minutes and would provide these in due course.
- b) The three actions from the July minutes were complete.

3) Quarterly Performance Commitment reporting

- a) Yorkshire Water will publish a quarterly customer focused report on its progress and delivery of performance commitments (PC) and the outcome projections on its enhanced performance webpage throughout AMP7.
- b) The company have created a quarterly report webpage, which includes an interactive dashboard covering all 43 performance commitments. The dashboard is customer focused and includes performance to date and year end forecast information and it will be refreshed each quarter.

Members raised questions about the understandability of aspects of the report (e.g. the use of the C- and D-Mex acronyms) by customers and a need for more introductory information and the explanation of purpose.

- c) The Forum stated that a useful infographic was presented previously at a Forum meeting and it was suggested that this may be a useful 'build' onto the website. The company advised they will be seeking feedback from customers regarding the quarterly reporting on the website and they will review this with the Forum.
- d) The company presented the reporting content as it will be displayed on the website. Each PC will be displayed with description and commentary, along with a year-end position forecast and a year to date target. Year to date performance and a RAG status indicator showing whether the PC is on track will also be displayed. The Forum queried the absence of any comparison of performance to other water companies. The company confirmed that comparative information would be completed on an annual basis for customers as not all companies present information on a quarterly basis.

- e) The status of each of the 43 performance commitments was presented to the Forum. The company advised that some of those off track are due to Covid-19, such as the education performance commitment, where schools were shut in April due to restrictions. Bathing water quality was also affected due to Covid-19; the EA advised that bathing water sampling regimes started later than scheduled, also due to COVID.
- f) In terms of next steps, when results are published for Q1 the company will circulate a link to the Forum for their feedback as well as obtaining feedback from customers. They will then develop an improvement plan for future reports. The performance for Q2 will be published in December 2020.

Action 1: Company to take feedback into account in the website development, link to be circulated.

4) Customer behaviour changes during Covid-19

- a) The company has undertaken a series of discussions with customers during the Covid-19 outbreak. Engagement has been both quantitative and qualitative. Discussions have included behaviour changes during lockdown (May 2020), the impact of Covid-19 on customer outlook (June 2020) and understanding how customers' lives are changing (July 2020). The research also looked at how lockdown has affected water use, customers' priorities, and customer attitudes towards reintroducing 'business as usual' appointments. The Forum was advised that all research was completed prior to the new recent local lockdowns introduced during August and September 2020.
- b) The research found that customers have felt impacted during Covid-19, noting differences across customer types. Customers are still feeling anxious, however, since lockdown has eased, they are starting to feel more positive. The research found younger customers are the most positive but remain anxious for themselves and family. The company advised that they realise that communications with customers' needs to be reflect how customers are feeling, and this was evident during the summer period, when communications regarding water use was reflected in a more positive and empathetic manner.
- c) Customers concerns over mental and physical health remain most prominent, although these have started to ease compared to earlier in lockdown. The Forum asked for examples of how these results are feeding into PCs and business as usual. The company advised that it has received

a lot of customer contact when teams were on site completing essential works, such as leaks. The company reassured customers that precautions were being taken regarding Covid-19 and government rules and essential works had to be maintained.

The company advised works in properties, such as water sampling, was put on hold, and now that colleagues are now speaking to customers to reintroduce this work and customer engagement shows they are more comfortable for works to resume. Customers are comfortable with the company resuming 'business as usual' if, following government guidelines, the company advised they are mindful of those customers who are higher risk and are in contact with them prior to appointments. They are also contacting customers should work be carried out within their area.

The Forum asked if the business is adopting any new technology. The company took an action to provide the Forum with an update.

- d) A third of customers are concerned about finances. Younger families are more concerned, and this has remained constant between both surveys (during lockdown and since lockdown eased).

- e) Almost all customers have been impacted by Covid, 62% reported they have been impacted a little, 33% reported a lot and 5% reported no impact. Older customers reported feeling severely impacted. The Forum queried an increase in vulnerability and customers struggling to pay bills as well as the company noticing challenges in paying bills. The company noticed in the first quarter that customers weren't taking the three-month payment holiday offered but were taking a month, which it believes was due to customers taking up mortgage holidays. The company advised that is expecting a high level of customer debt once furlough schemes unwind and they are making provision for this. The Forum advised they are seeing some redundancies across businesses. The company advised non household income was projected to be lower than forecast and household income is predicted to increase. The company advised that Ofwat intervened early on as they foresaw retailers struggling to pay wholesale charges; the company advised that in line with Ofwat guidance it has put a credit arrangement in place with retailers where, if they are struggling to recover income, the company will give them a part holiday on their wholesale charges, with the expectation it is caught up by the end of the financial year.

- f) A quarter of customers claim to be more conscious about their water usage compared to before lockdown. For younger households and those with children, cost is a factor. Younger families are likely to use less water than others. Those with children were twice as likely to use more water.
- g) Many customers continue to feel positive and uncertainty has declined due to lockdown easing. The company noted that it is mindful that not all customers feel this way. The company noted that everyone is experiencing the evolving 'new normal' in different ways with different outlooks, and the importance of listening to their customers. The company is planning to run another survey in a months' time.
- h) The Forum asked if there are lessons learnt from research now which will feed into the next survey, and how research will be undertaken for the next price review. The Forum also asked if there is research regarding customer behaviours and changes regarding wastewater. The company advised that it will add questions regarding wastewater to the next survey. They also advised they will look for more innovative ways to engage with customers in the future.

The Forum requested the customer data be circulated.

Action 2: Customer help towards paying bills to be added to the October agenda

Action 3: Survey data to be circulated to the Forum

5) Yorkshire Water & PR24 strategy planning

- a) The company introduced the item and asked Forum members to express an interest in areas of engagement they wanted to be a part of.
- b) The business strategy is to be part of the normal business process and connects to the company's ambition in its day to day operations and transformation. It is a six-stage process of revisiting the company's business strategy. The six stages are;
- Stage 0: preparation
 - Stage 1: baselining
 - Stage 2: external dynamics
 - Stage 3: opportunities landscape
 - Stage 4: outline strategy
 - Stage 5: defined strategy
 - Stage 6: evaluate

The timeframe is estimated to be between September 2021 to March 2022.

The company advised reviewing and starting earlier will give the opportunity to ensure the PR24 planning demonstrates the five-year programme that forms part of the AMP8 programme as the first part of the strategy.

- c) The development of the strategy will align with PR24. The timeframes displayed to the Forum will be confirmed once Ofwat has released the detail.

The baseline document will be built up in layers, using large blocks of data. The data will include; APR and supporting information, detailed financial information, people data, supplier data, a repository of land asset and associated information, a database in support of the Six Capitals review process and outputs of efficiency assessment exercises.

A draft structure of the document was provided to the Forum, split into five areas; region, regulatory requirements, core commitments, current choices and current trajectory. The company advised that it has not yet started writing the document but are in the planning stages.

The Forum queried where customers fit in the baseline document; the company advised customer data will be used within all the areas discussed.

The Forum queried how lessons learnt from PR19 will feed into PR24. The company advised several aspects will feed directly into the strategy, and parts of the review will feed across.

The company advised that, although they are looking to the longer term, there will be an element of the work to ready themselves for AMP8, for the short and long term, ensuring the company are as aligned as they can be to move towards the position they aspire to in the future.

- d) External dynamics were discussed, which include nine workshops. The Forum queried their representation at the workshops, the company advised the Forum are welcome to choose which they would like to attend and would value their contribution. Further details would be circulated.
- e) The company outlined its next steps to develop the baseline document, identify data gaps and address, confirm the workshop sessions and invite leading influencers and to update the Board this month.

The Forum requested insight into who is invited to the workshops to better understand the benefits and suggested the importance of the company acknowledging not everyone will be able to join virtual workshops. The company noted this, advising they would look to potentially record these workshops.

Action 4: Workshop dates to be circulated to the Forum

Action 5: Forum members to advise which dates they can attend

6) Green Recovery

- a) The Forum advised this follows on from a letter to water companies to accelerate investment as part of the Green Recovery from Covid-19. Water companies have also been challenged on improving performance on the environment, leakage and protecting supplies and the Environment minister flagged up storm overflows, chalk streams, water resources and leakage as issues of concern.

The EA advised it is helpful to see DEFRA's engagement and the step forward in how different regulators are working together. The EA also advised that it is important to be kept up to date as it is part of PR24 planning.

The company advised that it is keeping up to date with the government and Treasury and are supportive of green Recovery. The company noted that to date this is being discussed at a high level and if it progresses there needs to be careful consideration regarding investment.

- b) The company referred to combined sewer overflows and chalk streams, and advised it is part of the strategy being developed and is a direction that the company want to embrace. The company made the Forum aware of cost constraints but reassured the Forum they are on board with the direction.

The Forum noted, from a customer perspective, the climate assembly report fitting alongside what the company is planning. Members also mentioned reflecting customers priorities if investment is to be brought forward from AMP8.

Action 6: Six Capitals and their application to PR24 to be added to the next agenda

6) Customer complaint

- a) The Forum advised that it continue to be disappointed with the limited progress of the customer complaint and noted that the GSS payments to the customer, which it had expected to be paid as statutory, did not appear to be happening.
- b) The company advised the customer now has a single point of contact, some of the suggestions and preferences around cleaner operations, such as the customer hiring a specific contractor, had been agreed by the company. The customer has been advised that the escapes of flood water must be reported so that the appropriate GSS payment is made.

Payments have been reviewed and where payments have not been made, they will now be returned to the customer.

- c) Consumer Council for Water (CCW) advised that GSS payments require a technician onsite, as part of the process. They found other companies had adapted well to allow customers to use their own technology to record incidents, which has reduced visits. CCW felt there was a tone of mistrust displayed to this customer and emphasised that GSS payments are statutory. The company advised that it has spoken to the customer regarding footage and an alternative way of recording.

The Forum reflected that the customer has had to work hard to get what should happen as a matter of course and that if the process had been followed, CCW would not have needed to get involved.

- d) The Forum queried when, if a customer makes contact regarding a distressing circumstance, if they are informed of their statutory rights to a GSS payment. The Forum also asked if there is an indication of the number of reports received and, of those, how many received a GSS payment and how long it took to make the payment.

The Forum showed concern over issues linked to customer care and displayed interest in seeing the lessons learnt from this case. The Forum also noted concern over the complaints process within the business.

The Forum asked to see metrics regarding complaints and those outstanding over a timeframe. The Forum queried when a reason for a complaint is due to an operational matter, which may take two years to

rectify, what happens to the customer in this period, should it continue to affect them.

The Forum asked about the Director review. The company advised this has been completed, and the Director has made decisions to assist the customer and the Director is being kept updated. The Forum queried if the Director was to be actively involved in the case rather than being kept updated. The Chair requested a report be provided to the Forum regarding the outcome of the review.

Action 7: Company to provide further detail regarding GSS payments

Action 8: Director review report to be provided to the Forum

7) AOB

- a) The company advised the Forum that the business is not expecting a return to the office until April 2021. The company reassured the Forum that most colleagues can work effectively at home and those who need to return to the office due to the nature of their role, for example call centre staff, are being prioritised.

Next meeting

22 October 2020, Microsoft teams meeting

Actions

Summary of actions: 14 June 2018

No	Action	Comment
4	<p>Company to project the level of investment and timescales to display how discolouration will be reviewed to help the Forum understand the plan and resources.</p> <p>Post meeting update 06/06/2019: To be reviewed when received Final Determination (FD).</p>	Ongoing

Summary of actions: 13 December 2018

No	Action	Comment
3	Company to consult the Forum on the risk analysis regarding pollution and ISF alongside the EA and CCW (in 3 months' time).	Complete

Summary of actions: 24 July 2019

5	Company to circulate the result from the blockages campaign.	
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Summary of actions: 20 August 2019

4	Company will send a communication regarding totex and bill impacts.	Complete
6	Company to set up a meeting with several Forum members to discuss initiatives, speed and products of National Trust.	Ongoing

Summary of actions: 18 September 2019

2	Company to share Economic Insight paper with Forum members	Complete
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Summary of actions: 13 November 2019

6	Forum member to work with the Company to review and update webpage as discussed	Ongoing
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Summary of actions: 13 December 2019

1	Forum members to review and update their personal profiles for the website.	Complete
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Summary of actions: 19 March 2020

3	<p>Company to assess setting up specific engagement Forum regarding land strategy</p> <p>Post meeting update Company to attend the Forum in December 2020</p>	
6	<p>Company to provide a process for the steps between Company and Forum in the management, review and assurance of the PCs</p> <p>Post meeting update Planned for October 2020 meeting</p>	Planned for October 2020 meeting
9	<p>Company to investigate river pollution</p> <p>Post meeting update Yorkshire Water cleared the debris from the River Ouse on 14 and 15 April 2020, investigation on going into reported debris in the River Aire</p>	

Summary of actions: 23 April 2020

3	<p>Company to discuss land and property and environmental partnerships and feed back to the Forum</p> <p>Post meeting update Company to attend the Forum in the new year</p>	
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Summary of actions: 18 June 2020

4	Pollution reduction plan to be reviewed Post meeting update This will be reviewed at the 30 July meeting	Complete
8	Company to escalate the ongoing customer complaint	Complete

Summary of actions: 30 July 2020

1	Company to include additional information on the June 2020 minutes	Complete
2	Forum to provide link regarding the WRMP	Complete
3	Company to ensure the Director of Customer Service is made aware of the ongoing complaint	Complete

Summary of actions: 17 September 2020

1	Company to circulate a link when the results for Q1 are published	
2	Company to add billing regarding customer support to the October agenda	Complete
3	Company to circulate of the Covid-19 survey data to the Forum	Complete
4	Company to circulate workshop dates to the Forum	Complete
5	Forum members to advise which dates they can attend for the workshops	Complete
6	Company to add Six Capitals and application in PR24 to the next agenda	Complete
7	Company to display work regarding GSS payments	

8	Company to send the director review report to the Forum	
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