

Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers
Minutes of Meeting
20 June 2024
Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Chris Griffin	Independent Member
Dave Merrett	Independent Member
Kursh Siddique	Independent Member
Fiona Morris	Environment Agency
Steve Grebby	Consumer Council for Water

Apologies:

Andrea Cook	Chair
James Copeland	National Farmers Union
Jodie Hall	Citizens Advice
John Walker	Consumer Council for Water
Tom Keatley	Natural England

Guests:

Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
Kirstin Hutchinson	Yorkshire Water
Julian Jacobs	Atkins Realis
Tom Greenwood	Yorkshire Water
Georgina Woodhead	Yorkshire Water

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1. Minutes

- a) The Forum requested that the minutes from the April meeting be amended to highlight their concern with the level of complaints, including second stage complaints and escalations to CCW. They requested that the issue be brought before the Affordability and Vulnerability subgroup back to the Forum at a future meeting.
- b) With this amendment made, the April minutes have been approved.
- c) It was requested that Forum members raise any challenges to the May minutes by 28th June. If no challenges are received, these minutes can be considered approved.

2. Actions

- a) Open and in-progress actions were reviewed.
- b) Actions from January:
 - i. *The Company to circulate the outcome of the horizon scanning with details of how this will feed into Customer Research and Business Planning.* The Horizon Scanning report has been approved by the board and Simon Armistead will return to present this to the Forum. No update since the last meeting. Remains **in progress**.
- c) Actions from February:
 - i. *Add an Environment subgroup agenda item – deep dive Working with Others PC schemes, prioritised by spend.* Added to the draft agenda as a standing item. No update since last meeting. Remains **in progress**.
 - ii. *The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with the Forum [Working with Others PC].* To be actioned after audit. **Open**.
- d) Actions from March:
 - i. *The Company to send the research for enhancement cases and cost adjustment claims for smart metering and water mains replacement.* Study is ongoing, delivery has been somewhat delayed by a need for improved regional representation. No update, remains **open**.
 - ii. *The Company to keep CCW updated on Period Products activity.* Following a suggestion from a Forum member, The Company has invited a range of external parties (including other water companies) to the debrief due at the end of June. The Forum will also be invited to the debrief. **In progress**.

- iii. *Details of the newly proposed LORI schemes to be circulated to the Environment subgroup for consideration offline, with a view to approval. Presented at the June Environment sub group. **Completed.***

e) Actions from April:

- i. *The Company to source additional information on Ofwat's consultation relating to the Innovation Fund and share with the Forum. The specific question about Ofwat's evidence of customer support remains **open.***
- ii. *The Company to update the Forum on GSS changes. The Company confirmed that any proposed changes would be brought back to the Forum. Remains **open.***
- iii. *Vulnerable customer strategy to be added to May and June agendas. **Completed.***

f) Actions from May:

- i. **Action 1:** *Review detailed findings from the 2023 Water Matters report at a future Forum meeting. On the agenda for July. **In progress.***
- ii. **Action 2:** *Further detail on the Company's approach to the Social tariff in AMP8 to be brought to a future meeting, specifically that some companies appear to have gone further. On the agenda for July. **In progress.***
- iii. **Action 3:** *The Company to provide an update on its ambitions towards the eradication of water poverty. On the agenda for July. The Company noted that there are situations where customers are in water poverty which the water company cannot resolve and gave examples such as households in negative income, where their outgoings are more than their income; and households with large mortgages where interest rate rises have increased their monthly mortgage payment so they now meet the criteria for water poverty [water bill is 5% of their income after housing costs]. The Company instead focusses efforts on low income households **In progress.***
- iv. **Action 4:** *The Company to circulate details of the fish passage research on completion. The survey will soon be going live on the Online Community. The Forum asks for the report to be brought to the environment subgroup. **Open.***
- v. **Action 5:** *The Company to share a link to quarterly reporting on publication. The reporting can be found here [Yorkshire Water - Our performance](#). **Closed.***

- vi. **Action 6:** *The Forum chair to send draft content for the APR statement to the Company when ready, including reports from the two subgroups.* Draft content has been shared with the Company by the Chair. **Closed.**

g) New actions for June

- i. **Action 1:** Placeholder debrief meeting to be scheduled for early August.
- ii. **Action 2:** The Company to distribute notes from Ofwat's Your Water, Your Say event to Forum members.
- iii. **Action 3:** The Company to provide an update on the Total Household Complaints PC classification once resolved.
- iv. **Action 4:** The Company to share the final version of the draft Vulnerability Strategy document with Forum members.
- v. **Action 5:** The Company to share link to APR publication.

3. Update on Environment subgroup

- a) The Chair of the subgroup updated that a comprehensive review was carried out on pollution incidents particularly the serious incidents. A significant portion of the incidents related to rising mains, which are unmonitored and therefore require inspection or rely on reports.
- b) The subgroup examined the effectiveness of the Business Plan in tackling the causes of the incidents and determined that it significantly addresses them.
- c) It was highlighted that since submission, Ofwat have issued far more substantial guidance than in the previous Price Review (PR). This may lead to greater changes between the draft and the final plan.
- d) Consequently, the subgroup Chair suggested that a more intensive review of the amended plan may be needed than in previous PRs.
- e) The Company confirmed that when Ofwat have provided the Draft Determination (DD) the Forum will be provided with a summary of the content and differences from the plan submitted in October will be highlighted. There may be further changes between the DD and the Final Determination.
- f) The subgroup was given assurances that serious incidents are reviewed at senior level within 2 hours, and there is a route cause pollution analysis team dedicated to looking at the pollution incident.
- g) Self-reporting was raised as a concern by the EA. The Chair of the subgroup conveyed that the Company's aim not to report erroneous cases has led to challenges in meeting the 4-hour reporting deadline.

- h) In 2021, only 40% of cases were reported within 4 hours; this improved to around 60% in 2023. The subgroup will keep monitoring this situation as well as the serious pollution incidents.
- i) The Chair raised concern that the number of serious incidents has increased since before the subgroup's hiatus, and reiterated that the subgroup would be monitoring this situation closely.
- j) It was pointed out that the EA would work swiftly to remove any erroneous reports.
- k) The EA addressed concerns raised previously by the Company regarding the potential increase in reports and the strain on resources this could cause. It called on the Company to file reports appropriately and let the EA deal with prioritisation and resource allocation. It was explained that the EA is expanding the team to better manage such issues.
- l) The EA also raised that across the industry 50% of reports are filed within the first 30 minutes, whereas the Company filed far fewer last year. They suggested that focus should be on the timeliness of reporting rather than accuracy, since inaccurate reports can be corrected or removed later.
- m) The subgroup were also informed of the Environment Strategy including customer research and ongoing stakeholder engagement.
- n) The subgroup were updated on the Carbon Performance Commitment (PC). The targets for this were met in years 1-4 but will not be met in year 5 of AMP7 due to a change in policy around purchasing energy. Customer research was also presented showing a majority favour direct reductions rather than offsetting.
- o) The Company informed the subgroup that it generates 18% of the energy it uses currently and that the aim is to increase this to 40%.
- p) Elements contributing to the Carbon PC include energy consumption, fleet vehicle emissions, emissions from wastewater plants and embodied carbon in investment programmes.
- q) The Chair opined that it is clear the Company is taking the issue very seriously and there are major investments planned to drive down emissions on all fronts.
- r) The subgroup was provided with an update on the Length of River Improved (LORI). A further 4 projects were brought before the subgroup to substitute for other activity which had proved undeliverable. The overall picture of these projects and the contribution they would make to achieving the target, led the subgroup to provide support for all 4.

4. Research update

- a) Enhancement case and cost adjustment claim research continues. This is to explore customer support for cases which could be questioned by Ofwat in the Draft Determination (DD) but which are considered essential by the Company, such as smart metering and mains replacement.
- b) The debrief for the Period Products research is imminent and several Forum members expressed their intention to join.
- c) Other upcoming research projects include
 - i. Vulnerability strategy
 - ii. Fish passages
 - iii. Customer support for specific Company targets for internal and external sewer flooding, instead of a common target for all companies.
 - iv. Campaign testing
 - v. In-depth evaluation of customer journeys starting this month with wastewater. A Forum member suggested examining satisfaction not just for customers who report flooding, but customers at long-term risk of flooding.

5. PR24 Update

- a) The Company confirmed that Ofwat will publish its Draft Determination (DD) on 11th July. This will be publicly available via its website.
- b) This is an assessment of the business plan submitted by water companies last year.
- c) The Company will then have to respond to Ofwat by noon on 28th August.
- d) The Forum will be provided with a good summary of the DD at the 25th July meeting. This will highlight any changes that Ofwat have disagreed with.
- e) The Final Determination is due to be published on 19th December, so modifications can be made to the license ahead of bills being sent out to customers from 1st April 2025.
- f) Ofwat is hosting Your Water, Your Say events which will give customers and stakeholders the opportunity to ask questions of Ofwat regarding decisions in the DD.
- g) There is one event for Wales, and one event for England. The event for England will now be held on 23rd July. Forum members were invited to register for the event.
- h) Additionally, there is to be a meeting on 4th September where the Company will present to Ofwat regarding its view of the DD.

- i) The Company gave assurances that plans are in place to deliver against the timetable despite this now falling during a common holiday period.
- j) A Forum member commented on the timing of the Ofwat sessions, which are being held during the day, and how this could prove awkward for customers.
- k) A Forum member questioned whether the August Forum meeting would fall too late for the members to see the Company's response to the DD.
- l) The Company expressed hope that timings would allow for a preliminary perspective to be shared at the July meeting, acknowledging that governance will be ongoing and its official stance may evolve.
- m) The Company also stated its intention to be as transparent as possible with the Forum, promising to share any information prior to the meeting in August to facilitate feedback.
- n) The Forum member reminded that the Environment subgroup will meet on 15th August providing another opportunity for communication.
- o) The deputy Chair suggested considering holding a debrief meeting in early August, and getting that in calendars as soon as possible.

Action 1: Placeholder debrief meeting to be scheduled for early August.

- p) The deputy Chair inquired whether the company's notes from the Ofwat Your Water, Your Say event might be distributed to members of the Forum.

Action 2: The Company to distribute notes from Ofwat's Your Water, Your Say event to Forum members.

6. APR 2024

- a) The Company provided an introduction to the Annual Performance Report (APR).
- b) The APR is required to be published by 15th July each year.
- c) This year, the Company is striving to publish by 3rd July, and will definitely be publishing before DD.
- d) Typically, the report spans 300-400 pages and includes information on performance commitments (PCs), company strategy, data accuracy, along with Excel tables that hold about 10,000 data points.
- e) Regulatory reporting is all interlinked and it is crucial to maintain consistency in that reporting.

- f) The Company confirmed that a high level draft of the Forum's statement has been received from the Chair. Further information is needed before this can be copyedited.
- g) There are six PCs where the Forum is specifically mentioned in requirements. Five of these have been presented to the Forum at previous meetings. Integrated Catchment Management has not, since this is not being proactively progressed.
- h) There are 44 PC in total. 15 are common across the industry and can therefore be compared. 29 are bespoke PCs and 29 have rewards or penalties attached to the performance.
- i) At the end of 2023/4, the Company has met 21 of the 42 PCs with targets this year, resulting in an overall penalty position of £37m. The Company acknowledge that this performance is unsatisfactory but clarified that certain targets were missed by a small margin while others were missed by a greater extent.
- j) The Company provided the Forum with provisional outturn for the PCs.
- k) Independent external Level 3 assurance is provided by Deloitte from a financial perspective and this process is still ongoing.
- l) Regulatory reporting assurance reviews are undertaken by Atkins Réalis.
- m) The regulation director for Atkins provided a summary of the key findings and overall conclusions
 - i. Atkins' independence was reiterated.
 - ii. Atkins audit the Annual Performance Report (APR) including PCs and other data relating to Water, Wastewater, Water Resources, Retail and Bioresources.
 - iii. Components of the Environment Agency annual return are also audited along with Water UK's Levels of Service developer services metric, Water UK's Discover Water data, the CCW return, and the UK Government Environmental Reporting of Greenhouse Gases.
 - iv. 21 experienced auditors were deployed to carry out over 90 audits involving more than 120 auditees over 7 weeks.
 - v. Findings are assessed using RAG classifications. There are no Red (high priority) issues.
 - vi. AtkinsRealis commented that it received full cooperation from the Company and that a good culture was experiences with challenges being generally embraced.

- vii. At the point of presentation, there had been 350 issues and around 20 remained unresolved. These issues range from non-compliances and errors in data to areas for improvement.
 - viii. An overview of the PCs was shared, showing that the majority of areas are classified as Green (issues immaterial or no issues); seven areas were classed as Amber, either on the data or the methodology.
 - ix. For other regulatory reporting, there are minor issues around Payment Breaks, method of population estimation, and sewer blockages.
 - x. A Forum member questioned the classification of "TBC" on the PC for Total Household Complaints. Atkins explained that since the issue of measuring complaints is so complex, subjective and because of weaknesses in the industry guidance, further checks are underway to see if the figure is within the acceptable range of accuracy. This is expected to be resolved soon.
 - xi. In conclusion, Atkins pointed out that the number of issues (350) is higher than last year (295) but lower than in 2021 (504). The Company likes to see this number reducing, but Atkins explained that comparison of this number may not be meaningful and that a very low number may mean the audit had been ineffective. Action on the back of the issues, along with the Company's cooperation, are more important.
 - xii. The number of errors (28) is higher than last year (23) but lower than in 2021 (39).
 - xiii. Overall Atkins consider that the published metrics provide a fair and reasonable account of the Company's performance.
- n) A Forum member asked Atkins to highlight any particular areas for the Forum to focus attention. Atkins reminded that this focuses not on performance, but on the reliability of the reporting. Areas which are currently Amber should be monitored.
- o) A Forum member asked that the Forum be updated on how the issues with Total Household Complaints are resolved.

Action 3: The Company to provide an update on the Total Household Complaints PC classification once resolved.

- p) A Forum member asked for details of the issues around sewer collapses. The Company explained that the volume of manual assessments needed to determine the cause of sewer blockages/floods is high to ascertain if they led to a collapse, and if so, whether it fits the Operational or Regulatory definition.

Distinguishing between well-understood Operational collapses and those that qualify as Regulatory collapses requiring reporting involves significant manual effort. Manual reporting can lead to errors so more can yet be done to improve confidence with reported numbers.

- q) Atkins clarified that some significant issues raised last year had been resolved however this meant resource was less available for other checks but this led to lower impact issues.

7. Update on Vulnerability Strategy

- a) The Company updated on the Vulnerability Strategy which Ofwat require to be published in draft by the end of June.
- b) Ofwat sets out a series of baseline requirements that must be satisfied and recorded using standardised documentation.
- c) The Company has also produced a more impactful customer-facing summary document. This was shared with Forum members.
- d) The Company shared that the strategy was built around Ofwat's requirement to have a strategy which met five objectives.
 - i. High standards of service and support
 - ii. Inclusive by design
 - iii. Identifying customers
 - iv. Recording needs
 - v. Vulnerability strategies
- e) The strategy has been created through a process including consultation, feedback, development and collaboration with a range of stakeholders.
- f) After the draft version is submitted, this is reviewed by Ofwat and CCW during a 12 month period of feedback.
- g) A final version will be published by June 2025.
- h) The term "vulnerable" has been replaced in the customer-facing documentation with "by your side" reflecting trust, understanding and support, and use of the term "people needing extra help".
- i) Accessibility tools will be added to the final document to make it suitable for use with screen-readers, high contrast colours etc.
- j) Temporary needs have also been highlighted based on previous guidance from the Forum.
- k) Four cases studies have been included in the document as "By Your Side in action" to bring to life the support available.

- l) The detail about delivery of the commitments, objectives, goals, measures and future plans is broken down into four sections relating to the Ofwat objectives.
- m) Forum members were asked for feedback on anything which is missing and anything which could be described better. Whilst the document is a draft, the Company expect the document to drive the goals and objectives during the 12 month review period.
- n) A Forum member questioned how this would be rolled out and embedded, particularly across call centres and technicians in the field. The Company replied that the content of the strategy document has come from different area's business plans so already exists across the business. Colleague training is referenced throughout the document, particularly embedding the strategy into the culture of the business.
- o) A specific trial was highlighted of using leaflets in GP surgeries to highlight available support. A Forum member opined that these no longer work. Another member suggested use of TV screens in surgeries as a potential alternative.
- p) A member suggested flood risk warning signups may also provide a route to identify vulnerable customers.

Action 4: The Company to share the final version of the draft Vulnerability Strategy document with Forum members.

8. AOB

- a) A Forum member questioned how the APR publication will be shared. The Company stated that this will be via the website and can be emailed to the Forum on publication.
- b) The Company reminded the Ofwat will be assessing and ranking companies' performance later in the summer.

Action 5: The Company to share link to APR publication.

Actions tracker –

June 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	Placeholder debrief meeting to be scheduled for early August	Open
2	The Company to distribute notes from Ofwat's Your Water, Your Say event to Forum members.	Open
3	The Company to provide an update on the Total Household Complaints PC classification once resolved.	Open
4	The Company to share the final version of the draft Vulnerability Strategy document with Forum members.	Open
5	The Company to share link to APR publication.	Open

May 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	Review detailed findings from the 2023 Water Matters report at a future Forum meeting.	In progress
2	Further detail on the Company's approach to the Social tariff in AMP8 to be brought to a future meeting, specifically that some companies appear to have gone further.	Open
3	The Company to provide an update on its ambitions towards the eradication of water poverty.	Open
4	The Company to circulate details of the fish passage research on completion.	Open
5	The Company to share a link to quarterly reporting on publication.	Complete
6	The Forum chair to send draft content for the APR statement to the Company when ready, including reports from the two subgroups.	Open

April 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
2	The Company to source additional information on Ofwat's consultation relating to the Innovation Fund and share with the Forum.	Open
3	The Company to update the Forum on GSS changes.	Open

4	Vulnerable customer strategy to be added to May and June agendas.	Complete
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March 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
1	The Company to send the research for enhancement cases and cost adjustment claims for smart metering and water mains replacement.	Open
3	The Company to keep CCW updated on Period Products activity.	In progress
5	The Company to confirm whether there were any clean water initiatives to improve sustainability, e.g. grey water use solutions or water saving fittings.	Complete
7	Details of the newly proposed LORI schemes to be circulated to the Environment sub group for consideration offline, with a view to approval.	Complete

February 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
5	The Company to share data tables detailing benefits with The Forum [Working with Others PC]	Open
6	Add an Environment subgroup agenda item – deep dive Working with Others PC schemes, prioritised by spend	In progress

January 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
2	Minutes and papers for the monthly Forum meeting, as well as the subgroups, to be circulated at least 1 week beforehand.	In progress
4	The Company to circulate the outcome of the Horizon Scanning with details of how this is going to feed into Customer Research and Business Planning.	In progress