

**Yorkshire Forum for Water Customers**  
**Minutes of Meeting**  
**19 June 2025**  
**Microsoft Teams Meeting**

**Attendees:**

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

**Apologies:**

James Copeland	National Farmers Union
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**Guests:**

Richard Hepburn	Yorkshire Water
Donna Hildreth	Yorkshire Water
Herbie Cheema	Yorkshire Water
Josh Clayton	Yorkshire Water
Julian Jacobs	Atkins Réalis
Kirstin Hutchinson	Yorkshire Water
Rachel Barnard	Yorkshire Water

## Contents

1. Minutes.....	3
2. Actions .....	3
3. Update on Environmental Subgroup .....	5
4. Business Update .....	6
5. Research Update.....	7
6. Complaints update .....	8
7. APR2025.....	10
8. AOB .....	13
Actions tracker – .....	14
June 2025 .....	14
May 2025.....	14
April 2025.....	14
March 2025 .....	15
February 2025.....	15
January 2025 .....	15
December 2024.....	15
November 2024.....	15
October 2024.....	15
September 2024 .....	15
August 2024 .....	15
July 2024.....	15
June 2024 .....	15
May 2024.....	16
April 2024.....	16
March 2024.....	16
February 2024.....	16

## 1. Minutes

- a) The minutes from May were approved without any amendments.

## 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]. Moved to July's agenda due to absence. Remains in progress.*
- c) Actions from November 2024:
  - i. *The Company to finalise decisions about the future of the Forum. In progress.* Forum members reinforced that engagement with senior managers and directors needs to improve. The Company noted this is a key recommendation in its recommendation document. The Company aims to confirm next steps at July's meeting.
- d) Actions from December:
  - i. *The Company to investigate whether a Forum representative could occasionally attend the bi-weekly executive meeting where complaints deep-dives are undertaken.* Head of Service Operations to attend meeting to discuss. **Complete.**
- e) Actions from February:
  - i. *The Company provide a further update on complaints performance next quarter. Complete.*
- f) 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. Remains in progress.*
  - ii. *The Company agreed to circulate details of the estimated metered bill ranges. Complete.*
- g) Actions from May:
  - i. *Company to answer whether the ground water levels in the East of the county are below normal levels for the time of year. Complete.*
  - ii. *Company to update subgroup chairs on when the PC/ODI results will be made available to them. Complete.*
- h) New actions from June:

- i. **Action 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.
- ii. **Action 2:** The Company to provide any publicity plan for communication of the reasons for the bursts in York.
- iii. **Action 3:** The Company to provide health and safety information about asbestos cement pipes, particularly relating to any issues involved in their replacement.
- iv. **Action 4:** Further detailed reporting on complaints to be brought to July's meeting.
- v. **Action 5:** Company to share table detailing APR performance against targets.

### **3. Update on Environmental Subgroup**

- a) The subgroup chair provided an update on the recent meeting.
- b) The subgroup received information on water bursts management, with the Company reporting that it has the second highest mains repair rate in the UK.
- c) The Company highlighted the contributing factors including the range of different pipes and the very dry spring.
- d) Regarding the recent incidents in York, it was noted that the city's clay soil, when extremely dry, can cause movement in the pipes laid within it. It was explained that cast iron pipes possess limited flexibility, and this characteristic, when combined with the movement of the surrounding clay soil, can result in pipe bursts.

**Action 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.

- e) The Company informed the subgroup that, aside from the pipe and soil types in York, pressure surges at a local water tower had amplified the risk of bursts. These surges were caused by control systems, which have since been adjusted to eliminate the issue.

**Action 2:** The Company to provide any publicity plan for communication of the reasons for the bursts in York.

- f) When discussing the assets in the region the Company explained that the presence of asbestos cement pipes was not a cause for concern whilst the pipes remain stable.

**Action 3:** The Company to provide health and safety information about asbestos cement pipes, particularly relating to any issues involved in their replacement.

- g) The subgroup received an update on Carbon Emissions including the carbon neutrality 2030 target and target of net zero across all scopes by 2050.
- h) The Chair noted that they had asked the Company to provide an update on Scope 3 emissions. They also discussed contributions towards renewable energy from sites adjacent to but not on Company sites.

- i) The Company updated the subgroup on water resources, noting a more drastic and rapid reduction in reservoir levels this year.
- j) It was also noted that recent rainfall had reduced consumption to a point where reservoir levels had stabilised, but that was not expected to continue. The Chair pointed out that the Environment Agency (EA) had declared a drought in Yorkshire later that same day.
- k) The subgroup received assurances that groundwater levels were not a cause for concern.
- l) The next meeting of the environmental subgroup will be on 21<sup>st</sup> August to accommodate holidays.

#### **4. Business Update**

- a) The Company shared updated information about reservoir levels, indicating that they remain below the long-term forecast levels. The forecast suggests that there will be insufficient rain to restore reservoirs to acceptable levels. Consequently, the Company continues to prepare for a worst-case scenario, which includes significant media coverage on Look North, Calendar, and social media.
- b) The member for the EA confirmed that conversations were ongoing due to anticipated prolonged dry weather conditions.
- c) Members discussed drivers for the introduction of Temporary Usage Bans (TUBs) and how measures would be communicated to customers including exemptions, preparations and real world impacts. It was noted that the introduction of TUBs would have potential to lead to increased customer contacts and complaints.
- d) It was also observed that a coordinated message from various groups, including the Company, regulators, and environmental organisations, would be more effective. Additionally, an approach emphasising the protection of the environment rather than focusing on the restricted human use for gardening and leisure activities would be more acceptable.
- e) It was noted by the Company that companies using a large amount of water in the region would typically be aware of water resources via open data sharing of the water situation report.
- f) The Company updated on their recent quarterly performance meeting with Ofwat and other regulators. Discussions included reporting; performance improvements; pollution event transparency and the board's role in holding senior managers to account.

- g) Ofwat will release its latest annual water company performance report in autumn, comparing the performance of different companies.

## **5. Research Update**

- a) The Company shared results from their recent Domestic Tracker report.
- b) The report presents findings from an ongoing survey, which involves monthly telephone interviews with 300 customers to assess their perceptions of the Company, their level of trust, and their views on value for money.
- c) The Company explained that their correlation analysis suggests that customers with a greater awareness of financial assistance programmes, the Priority Services Register (PSR) and related support services have a greater perception of the Company.
- d) As of May 2025, financial assistance awareness reached 55%, the highest level recorded since the survey began. This appears to be a consistent trend, rather than an anomaly, as indicated by data from the previous four months. This increase in awareness is believed to have contributed to recent improvements in other reputational metrics such as trust, perception, and value for money, despite the longer-term trend continuing to decline.
- e) The Company explained its findings indicate that communication efforts asking customers to save water, including visuals of drying reservoirs and green verges, faced criticism, especially on social media. Customers questioned the need to save water following bill increases and negative media coverage, highlighting the challenge in balancing such messages.
- f) The Company noted that 37% of customers have seen communications regarding the dry weather; however, significant reductions in water usage have not yet been seen. Awareness is increasing, but its impact remains uncertain.
- g) The Company is currently undertaking research engaging with customers through interviews, surveys, and focus groups to better understand how it can position itself amidst negative media coverage and rising bills. The goal is to improve customer accountability for water use while fostering positive perception.
- h) The report detailing these findings will be shared with members on completion.
- i) A Forum member noted that it's important not to place too much importance on social media since it reflects only a small, engaged segment of society. They opined that engaging with people in real life to gauge sentiment is far more valuable and it's beneficial to go out, gather ideas, and find ways to

adjust messaging based on real feedback: to adapt and stay open to good ideas to better connect with diverse customer groups.

- j) The Company explained that messages are being tested with focus groups made up of a range of engaged and less engaged customers. Forum members were invited to attend, or view live streams or their recordings.

## **6. Complaints update**

- a) Forum members were introduced to Herbie Cheema, Head of Service Operations. He explained that he oversees customer-facing teams in contact centres, digital departments, and social media units; ensuring that the customer experience is at the core of our service delivery.
- b) He stressed that understanding key issues and priorities through the Forum is essential for effective representation within the business. Relating specifically to complaints, he believes in tracking progress, acting on discussions, and is eager to understand the Forum's expectations.
- c) The Company shared data showing that over the past few months, specifically in Q4 and Q1, a slight increase in complaints received has been seen.
- d) During the Q4 period, this rise was significantly impacted by adverse weather conditions. The wastewater network experienced an uptick in sewer flooding incidents, and customers specifically seeking updates on these issues during that period led to the increase.
- e) It noted that a large proportion of these complaints are not categorised as regulated complaints and they do not progress to stage 1, stage 2, or escalated complaints. Instead, these are expressions of dissatisfaction from customers via telephone or other contact methods, that do not enter the formal complaints process.
- f) The Company's goal for the upcoming year is to achieve a 20% reduction in overall complaints, particularly those that do not advance to formal complaint stages.
- g) It explained that significant progress has been made in limiting the number of escalated complaints, and those reaching stage one. However, challenges remain around negative language and customer dissatisfaction, particularly concerning sewage escapes and burst leaks.
- h) Despite ongoing efforts and restructuring within the wastewater teams, including additional staffing, reducing these initial expressions of dissatisfaction remains a key challenge.
- i) "Complaint NFAs" (No Further Action) are cases where customers express dissatisfaction but do not pursue regulated complaints. The initial dissatisfaction is often resolved within 24 hours without progressing through



formal stages. However, the higher volume of "complaint NFAs" highlights the need to address customer concerns more effectively before they escalate.

- j) The Company aims to improve expectations management and engage with customers more thoroughly to reduce formal complaints as reported to CCW.
- k) The Company provided an example of a "complaint NFA": a customer expressed dissatisfaction with an increase in their bills, despite understanding that the additional revenue would be used for infrastructure improvements, such as building more reservoirs and laying more pipes. Ultimately, the customer understood the necessity of the investment but remained unhappy about the higher charges. When asked specifically if they wanted to complain, the customer said no.
- l) An example was also given to explain why numbers of "complaint NFAs" can be particularly high. A customer reported a local burst and expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived delay in repairing the leak but declined to raise a formal complaint. The customer subsequently contacted the Company for updates and continued to express dissatisfaction but again choose not to file a formal complaint. Both interactions are recorded as "complaint NFAs."
- m) In response to a question from the Chair, the Company explained how calls are handled in a neutral manner, ensuring that customers are not discouraged from raising formal complaints if they choose to do so.
- n) The Company detailed that in 2024/25, particularly in the last quarter, there was an increase in wastewater complaint NFAs. These complaints are largely related to customer dissatisfaction with response times for visits, uncertainty about next steps, or displeasure with experiencing the issue at all. Internal and external sewer flooding incidents have notably contributed to customer dissatisfaction.
- o) It noted that there has been significant improvement in our clean water operations over the past financial year. Responses to bursts have been enhanced by reducing resolution times and improving customer management throughout the process. Although a slight spike was seen in January and February, consistent with seasonal temperature fluctuations, resulting leakage incidents have been effectively managed.
- p) The Company's new operational model and contract partners have facilitated considerable progress in addressing issues and despite some significant escalations in waste management during the period, the situation has now stabilised and new processes and ways of working are being implemented.
- q) Following a question from the Chair, the Company explained that it is working internally and with regulators to standardise this across the industry as well as Company-wide. It was clarified that neither the customer nor the agent

determines whether the complaint is classified as NFA, stage 1, or stage 2. This classification occurs when the agent categorises the call. The NFA designation is closely tied to whether there are any remaining actions for the Company to undertake.

- r) A Forum member challenged YW's response time and communication regarding internal sewer flooding as lagging behind other companies. It was suggested that the impact of an ISF event alongside the company's current service level could be driving complaints. It was further noted, that the PR24 business plan make significant demands on YW's response on ISF.
- s) A Forum member requested a detailed breakdown of Complaints reporting beyond Water and Wastewater categories.

**Action 4:** Further detailed reporting on complaints to be brought to July's meeting.

## **7. APR2025**

- a) The Company provided an update on the Annual Performance Review (APR) ahead of publishing the report in July.
- b) It was explained that all the regulatory reporting is interlinked. Every year, an annual performance report is produced detailing performance and regulatory accounts for the previous financial year. This includes reconciliations linked with the Price Review to check if we delivered as planned or need adjustments.
- c) There are also new price control deliverables reporting due in July. All this information together tells a comprehensive story of the Company's performance, which impacts future plans.
- d) The APR is extensive, comprising a 400-page document, two Excel spreadsheets with 10,000 data points, and various models. The goal is publish by Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July to meet the regulatory deadline of Tuesday July 15<sup>th</sup>.
- e) This year, 19 of the 44 Performance Commitments (PCs) and 4 of the 12 common commitments used by Ofwat in their annual comparison have been met, resulting in a penalty of approximately £44.7 million. Although it's a disappointing outcome, the Company is actively working on improvements and will continue performance discussions with Ofwat quarterly.
- f) Performance against the PCs was shared with Forum members. The Company offered to provide further detail at future meetings or subgroup meetings if required.

- g) The Company explained that all published information undergoes thorough checks. There are strong controls in place to guarantee accuracy and true representation of the Company's performance.
- h) An internal audit was conducted again this year, which confirmed the soundness of their controls and processes. This provides reassurance that reporting is reliable and the risk of misreporting is low.
- i) Three levels of assurance are conducted with Atkins Réalis providing an independent Level 3 assurance check as the final review.
- j) Atkins Réalis provided a review of their audit findings, covering scope, how findings are assessed, summary key findings and overall conclusions.
- k) The APR is an Ofwat process and there are other components reported to various entities such as the Environment Agency, the Drinking Water Inspectorate, and CCW.
- l) It was explained that there is a new element regarding Licence Condition G, around customers introduced approximately a year and a half ago. This requires a statement to Ofwat which Atkins Réalis have assured.
- m) Earlier in the year, an in-depth review of all processes and reporting was conducted, which yielded positive results regarding the Company's measures.
- n) The APR involves extensive reporting requiring a team of 19 members conducting over 80 audits with contributions from more than 100 people. The operation functions efficiently due to strong management by the Company's regulation team and their organisational skills.
- o) A red, amber, green rating system is used to evaluate issues. A red rating indicates a significant issue with either the approach or the reporting. Amber ratings suggest shortfalls in the approach, documentation, or data, while green ratings indicate no issues or continuous improvement areas.
- p) Overall, Atkins Réalis noted they receive excellent engagement from the Company, ensuring prompt provision of documentation and data. Any gaps are quickly addressed. The full programme is nearly complete, save for one financial audit-related activity.
- q) 317 issues have been logged this year, slightly fewer than last year. The number itself is less critical than the resolution process, and so initial categorisation and outcomes are tracked. Currently, only eight minor issues remain unresolved.
- r) In terms of performance reporting, despite some PCs not being fully met, the accuracy of the reporting is reliable with most elements rated green. The consistency with last year's results indicates no new unresolved problems and that long-standing issues remain under continuous management.

- s) The Chair asked why the Total Household Complaints data had been categorised as amber.
- t) It was explained that has been amber for three years running because of reporting accuracy. Complaint reporting, inherently subjective, is not expected to be better than within 10%. While other data areas may be within 1%, the Company's confidence in complaint reporting is between 10% and 25%, leading to potential underreporting of up to 25%. Had the complaint reporting been within 10% variance a green rating would have been awarded.
- u) The auditors noted that such variability is not unusual. The complexity of complaints guidelines is seen as adding to these issues.
- v) It was noted that Total Household complaints was no longer a PC in AMP8 and that Ofwat had removed complaints reporting from C-MeX. Whilst complaints is no longer a PC, it will continue to be reported.
- w) The Company stated that it is continuing to work on level 2 assurance checks for complaints and suggested updating the Forum accordingly.
- x) Besides the PCs, there are around 600 other data lines; only 5 are not classified as green for either the data or methodology including population quantification and sewer blockages.
- y) In conclusion, Atkins Réalis noted that the numbers of issues identified over the 5 years of auditing is very stable.
- z) Errors in data have been identified in 25 cases, some minor, others more material.
- aa) The auditor concluded that the Company will publish a fair and reasonable account of its performance, recognising that where there are issues the Company is transparent and open.
- bb) The Chair asked whether the auditor would want to draw members attention to any particular matter relating to the audit. Atkins Réalis replied that Forum should take comfort from the level of effort invested by the Company in conducting the audit and the cooperation they receive.
- cc) In response to a question from The Chair, Atkins Réalis assured that the Forum could be confident in the Company's thorough audit efforts and cooperation.
- dd) The audit identified no issues with data or methodology concerning the Working with Others PC. Challenges about the accuracy of additional benefits have been addressed and resolved.
- ee) A Forum member inquired about the best way to resolve APR-related queries before writing their statement. The Company responded with the relevant information.
- ff) A Forum member emphasised the need to highlight performance against targets when presenting this information to customers, stating they felt it

essential to note where success was marginal, significantly below target, or exceeded expectations as providing context ensures that customers understand true performance rather than assuming overall failure.

**Action 5:** Company to share table detailing PC performance against targets.

## **8. AOB**

a) No other business was raised.

## **Actions tracker –**

### **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
5	Company to share table detailing APR performance against targets.	Complete

### **May 2025**

Ref.	Action	Status
1	Company to answer whether the ground water levels in the East of the county are below normal levels for the time of year.	Complete
2	Company to update subgroup chairs on when the PC/ODI results will be made available to them.	Complete

### **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
3	The Company agreed to circulate details of the estimated metered bill ranges.	Complete

## March 2025

All actions completed.

## February 2025

Ref.	Action	Status
3	The Company provide a further update on complaints performance next quarter.	Complete

## January 2025

All actions completed.

## December 2024

Ref.	Action	Status
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.	Complete

## 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