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FRIDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2021

**MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

**MEETING NOTES**

**PRESENT:**

Chair and Independent Member: Melanie Laws

For CCW: Graham Dale and Barbara Leech

For the Environment theme: Richard Powell (Vice Chair and Independent Member)

For the Communities theme: Mary Coyle (Independent)

For the Customer theme: Simon Roberson (Independent) and Lesley Crisp (Independent)

For Economic Impact theme: Steve Grebby (CCW) and Iain Dunnett (New Anglia LEP)

For National Farmers Union: James Copeland (Vice Chair and Independent Member)

Water Forum Independent Author: Sarah Young

In attendance: Ann Cousins, Arup (for Item 8)

For the Company: Louise Hunter, Jim Strange, Ross Smith, Elaine Erskine, Mark Wilkinson, Caralyn Tettmar, Helen Lumsdon and Ian Gray

Jill Slater and Jude Huffee (Water Forum Secretariat)

**NOTES AND ACTIONS**

**1. Welcome, apologies and aims of the meeting**

Melanie Laws (MJL) welcomed Members to the meeting. MJL also welcomed Barbara Leech who had joined the Forum as the new consumer advocate from CCW (Simon Roberson's replacement).

Apologies had been received from Anna Martin-Edwards (Groundwork East), John Torlesse (Natural England), Sarah Glendinning (CBI), Hannah Campbell (Natural England), Roger Martin (EA) and Melissa Lockwood (EA).

**2. Notes and actions from the last meeting**

Lesley Crisp (LC) confirmed she was in attendance at the Water Forum meeting in June but was not noted on the attendance list or the list of apologies. Company to update the minutes. (ACTION: Company).

There were no other matters arising and the minutes were approved as a true record.

**3. Water Forum Future Programme**

MJL asked the Forum to consider any items which they would like to be added to the Water Forum Future Programme from March 2022, and also any items which they would like to be considered at the next meeting in December. Items currently being looked at for December are:

- An update on Net Zero.
- Water Environment Improvements update.
- Reflection on the Innovation Festival.

MJL updated the Forum that four main meeting dates are being looked at for next year, which seems appropriate with the number of Sub-Groups.

Members thought it would be good to bring the Forum together for a one-off meeting once Ofwat's plans for PR24 are understood.

A Member asked if any thought had been given to when face-to-face meetings of the Forum will resume. It was agreed that this subject will be discussed at the Forum meeting in December, in advance of the dates for next year. MJL noted that the virtual meetings have worked well but thought that the Forum will need to see how things go in the future and welcomed thoughts from Members on this.

#### **4. Members' Deliberation**

MJL asked the Forum for any reflections or issues since the last meeting, or for any reflections on the papers which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Members had been supplied with the following meeting papers:

- Inclusivity and Affordability Sub-Group update
- Customer Complaints update
- Climate Adaptation Plans
- Community Investment Strategy

Members were concerned about the fast pace in changes in regulation and policy and the number of consultations associated with that, and the challenges which customers are going to face as a result. Members advised this could have a significant impact on customers' preferences in the next Price Review and wondered how the Company can ensure that future customer engagement influences responses to consultations on broader topics as well as PR24 planning. There was a need to understand what customer engagement was being carried out from other organisations as it could end up with engagement overload. Members noted that clarity was needed on how the Company will pull all relevant information together. Members were concerned that other issues, which were customer priorities in the past, will get pushed to one side because Environment was rising up the agenda, and that companies need to effectively manage competing demands. Members agreed to ask the Company that in future papers they would include detail on the expected impact to customers on each area of work being presented.

#### **5. The Company join the meeting**

MJL welcomed the Company to the meeting.

Louise Hunter (LH) gave an update on the PR24 engagement review. The Company was doing a huge amount of background work, but at present there was nothing substantive to share as it was currently in the review stage. The Company advised they had responded to Ofwat's consultation which included comments around their plans for customer engagement. CCW had also carried out some work in this area, in which the Company had participated including through workshops. A huge amount had been learnt from the CMA process about how elements of customer engagement were viewed. The Company had commissioned pieces of work, which would build on the previous review of the Water Forum's role at PR19. The Company commissioned Corporate Culture who had just completed a piece of work to look at the engagement that the Company did for PR19 and how the models used compared to other companies' approaches, and what could be improved for PR24 and for future models. The outcome was that the Company was in a great place and that the work it did on PR19 was to a very high standard and probably the best engagement seen across all of the companies. Corporate Culture had made some recommendations to build on this. The Company was also commissioning a piece of work to look at what great customer engagement in a regulated industry should look like, which the Company would use as a basis for how it moves forward. This

was due to report back by the end of the year. Members agreed it was a sensible approach and look forward to a conversation when this had progressed. (ACTION: Company).

MJL updated the Company on the conversation the Forum had had during the Members' deliberation and asked if the Company could summarise the impact for customers at the top of each paper being presented to the Forum. It would also be helpful if the Company could identify specific issues where it would like a Water Forum view at the end of each paper. The Company agreed that was a good idea. (ACTION: Company).

On the Regulatory update, Members noted the comment that the Company felt the current approach to asset health and maintenance needs reform. Members said it would be helpful for them to understand what the Company's concerns are, the current method, and why it feels it needs reform.

On the CEO update, Members congratulated the Company on the four-star Environmental Performance Assessment for 2020, and asked if the three outstanding issues on pollution incidents were now finalised. Jim Strange (JS) will provide Members with a note on the asset health and maintenance question, and pollution incidents. (ACTION: Company).

## 6. Inclusion and Affordability Sub-Group update

Members had been supplied with a paper by Mark Wilkinson (MW) which was taken as read. MW gave a presentation to the Forum on this subject.

Members noted:

- It was good the Company had pushed back on the digital route in the recent Ofwat Debt Guidance consultation. The Company approach was to give the customer as many avenues as possible to be in contact with the Company, which was very important for customers, particularly for older generations. Using trusted organisations to aid in the conversation would also be sensible. The Company submitted a response to the consultation and in general felt the balance and approach was not consistent.
- Some of the new guidance from the ICO in relation to priority services data sharing gives the Company a way in to allow other people to represent customers, such as family members or friends, that previously the Company was unable to do.
- They were pleased to see that the Company mentioned payment breaks for those waiting for universal credit.
- Due to changes in the Company's proactive approach to discuss priority services with callers, the Company advised it had seen the number of sign ups reduce. It was hoped that this would increase again as resource comes back on line within the call centre. In the meantime the Company had been using targeted communications and also carry out partnership work. More work had been done with Age UK, in particular with Age UK North Tyneside. A data sharing agreement was being set up with UK Power Networks.

## 7. Customer Complaints update

Members had been supplied with a paper by Caralyn Tettmar (CT) and Helen Lumsdon (HL) which was taken as read. CT and HL gave a presentation to the Forum on this subject.

Members were pleased to see that the Company were taking a long term view and focusing on how to improve the number of complaints. This was an area the Forum would like to be kept updated on. (ACTION: Company).

The Company was seeing a significant increase in campaigns from groups like Surfers Against Sewage. LH updated that one of the things which had increased wastewater complaints was that Surfers Against Sewage have developed an automated app, so whenever the live data system notifies that Storm Overflows were spilling into coastal bathing waters, the app prompts a complaint letter to Heidi Mottram, the Customer Contact Centre and to the local MP. Ross Smith (RS) and LH are

working with local MPs and campaigners to engage them more constructively and looking at solutions. Members did not envisage this going away in the short term and asked the Company if it feels that it had a strong enough environmental case to be able to educate people on the long-term nature of the issue and also the impact on Government announcements relating to unavailability of chemicals used in treatment. The Company advised that it was participating fully in the Government's Storm Overflow Taskforce and had representatives at all of the Sub-Groups. Heidi Mottram would be speaking at the Environmental Audit Committee in October on this issue. It was important to take an open and transparent position. One thing the Company was doing successfully was customer education and briefing MPs. In the North, interest seemed to be with coastal waters and the Company was looking at how it can extend its Water Rangers programme to cover more coastal bathing water areas. Members and the Company agreed that the SOs issue was a critical area for the Company to focus on.

## **8. Climate Adaptation Plans**

Members had been supplied with a paper by Ian Gray (IG) which was taken as read. IG gave a presentation to the Forum on this subject.

Members noted that customer engagement was crucial to help them understand the impacts and the changes necessary. Members commented that a simplified guide to climate adaptation would be helpful, that communicating this to customers will be a challenge. The Company advised that part of the work being carried out was focusing on four possible future scenarios which will help with engagement.

Members agreed that the Environment Sub-Group should be kept updated.

Members advised that the updates in the CEO report and the Climate Adaptation paper were very welcome and demonstrated a leading focus, but some of the other documentation coming out from the Company did not sell it as strongly as it could do. The Company advised that as it progressed with its PR24 plans new strategies would be developed and these would incorporate the resilience work and approach being developed. The piece of work on Purpose which RS had been working on was important in ensuring the language becomes more consistent.

## **9. Community Investment Strategy**

Members had been supplied with a paper by RS which was taken as read. RS gave a brief summary and introduction on the subject.

Members asked how the Company had engaged employees in development of the strategy, how confident the Company was that employees would rise to the challenge, and how third parties could engage with this agenda. The Company responded that it had worked with a Task Group set up across the business and drawn on a range of data prior launching the strategy. A number of groups around the business had been engaged including the early careers development group, diversity and inclusion group and the employee consultative group that includes trade unions. External partners were also consulted early in the process as they would be a key part in the strategy implementation.

Members noted that the Company did not engage enough with customers on the partnership and community work they did, such as Branch Out and Water Environment Improvements. The Company responded that this strategy would help create a framework to communicate this better. The Company asked for the Forum's help in telling the story about what it was doing in communities, and ideas for how the Company could do this more effectively would be very welcome. (CHALLENGE: Water Forum).

Members noted it was good to see the strategy and that there were lots of opportunities to provide additional value, such as through capital investment programmes. The Water Environment Improvement ODI was not fully mentioned in the strategy and could be built into it. Members suggested engaging partners to tell the Company's stories.

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The Water Forum welcomed the Company taking into consideration its Challenges in developing its Community Investment Strategy and said they were keen to be kept updated on the work and how this was communicated to customers.

**The meeting concluded and Members then resumed in camera where their meeting review took place – a summary of this review is in Appendix 1.**