
FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2019
PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL
MEETING NOTES

PRESENT:

Chair: Melanie Laws

For Customer Council for Water: Bernard Crump, Graham Dale and Simon Roberson

For Environment Agency: Melissa Lockwood

For Natural England: Hannah Campbell

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

For the Communities theme: Mary Coyle (Independent)

For the Customer theme: Lesley Crisp

For Economic Impact theme: Steve Grebby (CCW)

For National Farmers Union: James Copeland

Water Forums Independent Author: Sarah Young

For NWL Board: Margaret Fay (Independent Non-executive Director)

For the Company: Louise Hunter, Richard Warneford, Nigel Watson, Dawn Creighton and Elaine Erskine

Ros Shedden and Jude Huffee (Water Forum Secretariat)

NOTES AND ACTIONS

1. Welcome, apologies and aims of the meeting

Melanie Laws (MJL) and members welcomed Simon Roberson (SR) to his first quarterly meeting.

Apologies had been received from Iain Dunnett, Sarah Glendinning, Dominic Hopkins, Anna Martin, Roger Martin, Mark Reed, Stephen Rothera, Caroline Taylor and John Torlesse.

MJL said the meeting would have an innovation and communities theme and the items were also chosen with the aim of keeping members up to date with Company progress on the PR19 Business Plan themes.

Members noted that they had no interests to declare.

2. Notes and actions from the last meeting

Members agreed the 11 September 2019 meeting notes with one minor correction.

3. Forum programme

Members agreed that the programme should be available at every meeting so they could see what was in the pipeline and which topics were to be worked on.

4. Sub-Group update

Nominations Committee – Bernard Crump (BC) reminded Forum members of their January 2019 review, where they had given their views on the future of the Forums. BC and the Nomination Committee worked with MJL on these views and they now had proposals on changes to Forum structure which members would see and review on 29 January 2020.

Inclusivity Sub-Group – Mary Coyle (MC) said members had a very productive visit to StepChange on 2 October 2019. They had been given informative and useful presentations. Due to a change in StepChange’s operating systems, they had been unable to listen to live calls. Instead they had listened to a recorded call and had been able to understand the essence of the process. They were very impressed with the way StepChange people dealt with such harrowing issues. A StepChange team member had joined their visit and she had told them she was impressed with how much NWG had invested time and effort in the partnership and were evidently keen to help people.

Members noted:

- StepChange was a great organisation and asked for a future visit to be arranged, possibly to the Newcastle office (Action Company); and
- a small amount of money, given early, can help stop people going down the bad debt route.

DWQ Sub-Group – Richard Powell (RP) updated members on visits to Leat House Regional Control Centre (RCC) and Howdon Laboratory. Sub-Group members had been very impressed with the RCC, they had seen an excellent system which gave a real time view across the Company’s networks. The RCC managed the water networks 24/7 and wastewater networks on an evening. Sub-Group members found the Howdon Laboratory visit equally fascinating. They had agreed that they saw Company expertise, each in their own speciality.

Forum members noted that customer call centre calls were transferred to the RCC on an evening. Although the RCC did not receive many calls, a different skills set was surely required and they questioned whether this was appropriate especially given the unrivalled customer service commitment the Company had promised. (Action: Company).

Environment Sub-Group – members noted that a general update had been given to the Sub-Group. It was good to see the Company was busy moving plans forward on a number of the areas in the PR19 Business Plan. Sub-Group members had agreed that more work was now needed on the governance of the Environment Partnership group.

5. Chair’s update and members deliberation

Ofwat meeting

MJL updated members on the 9 October 2019 Ofwat meeting which she had attended with the Company.

MJL said the Company and Ofwat had a very open exchange of views on the Draft Determination at the meeting. The Company focused on two key issues; enhancement investment and financeability. Ofwat’s Final Determination (FD) was to be issued on 16 December 2019.

Members’ deliberation

Members had been supplied with the following meeting papers:

- Getting value from innovation paper
- Communities update
- CEO update
- Regulatory update

Members deliberated on the papers they had received and prepared for discussion with the Company. Members noted that the papers were excellent and well received with sufficient detail and information.

6. The Company joined the meeting

MJL welcomed the Company's ELT. Members and the Company acknowledged the next steps for PR19, the FD, the value of the 9 October meeting with Ofwat and the unknowability of the outcome of the FD.

Water resources

Members noted that:

- water resource levels in the Northumbrian area were higher than historical monthly averages;
- the severe weather had caused deterioration of the raw water and subsequent intermittent treatment issues;
- customer supplies had not been affected on either quantity or quality; and
- in Essex & Suffolk water resource levels were where the Company expected them to be.

Sewer flooding

With regard to sewer flooding, Richard Warneford (RW) said that the Company was being challenged as the extreme wet weather conditions were stretching its resources. A strategy is being put in place which included a new customer communication campaign in 2020. Members agreed that the Environment Sub-Group would carry out a visit to discuss strategy and see the work the Company was doing. (Action: Environment Sub-Group).

Members also agreed that the issues around third party/developer sewer damage should be picked up by the Environment Sub-Group, especially how the Company was dealing with this and working with its developers (Action: Environment Sub-Group). BC also advised members that CCW would be holding a meeting in Peterborough to focus on the work with developers as they felt this was a neglected issue and needs more focus. Members would receive an invite via the Forum Secretariat. (Action: BC and Secretariat).

Environment Agency advised that its EPA consultation is due in December with an indication that there would be a tighter targets for the sector and companies needed to be aiming for zero pollutions.

Health and Safety (H&S)

With regard to remote working, members asked if the Company used the 'What 3 words' app. James Copeland (JC) advised it was a useful tool to have. RW agreed that it was useful and the Company encouraged its people to use it, but at present were not making it compulsory. JC pointed out that in rural areas it was critical and the NFU was pushing for this to be used. RW asked JC to discuss this with the Company H&S department. (Action: Company and JC).

7. Getting value from innovation

Nigel Watson (NW) said he wanted to pick up from his last presentation to the Forums (18 September 2017).

Members noted that the paper gave them a broad overview of the innovation taking place across the business and with partners. They were glad to see the progress of a number of ideas from the Innovation Festival and the further development of Innovate East with water industry partner, Anglian Water which a number of members attended. They were keen to see the outcomes from Amplify and InvestQuest and how the partnership with Faversham House would work. They noted that InvestQuest in particular was really empowering the workforce with both a commercial and social impact.

NW highlighted that innovation was a big process – the Company’s framework was to make idea generation a very open process available to wide audience.

With regard to internal innovation members noted that:

- the innovation process generated ideas but the process of making them happen was the hard part;
- people focus on the BAU and the business needed to see how they could take people offline to work on ideas;
- the wastewater team was ahead of the game and was keen to look at new ideas; and
- the water team needed to be more open to ideas and take them forward.

With regard to the Innovation Festival, Innovate East and other events, members noted:

- the Company would not go down the intellectual property (IP) route as this was probably why others collaborated enthusiastically. In 2019 it had received £6m worth of professional services from EE at the events, the ideas were seen as joint partnership;
- it was good to see how the Company has been able to leverage money from external sources to fund innovation and that they were now seeing return on investment; and
- to date, the Company had seen benefits of c.£5m, mostly through data science, eg sewer pollution work had already produced results, and with a further £15m expected over five years from additional innovations in the pipeline regarding wastewater optimisation, the common underground map and asset intelligence.

Members also noted:

- with regard to AMP7, the Company had stretching targets and the Company would need to be innovative in the ways it works and they were very keen to see the ideas that would come out of the initial work at the start of AMP7, and then see its progression;
- the Company was able to use the relationships it had from the wider CKI group (eg Northern Gas Networks), and it also had an annual opportunity to do a ‘show and tell’ in Hong Kong to share best practice;
- the work being carried out on underground mapping was very interesting but members were keen to see the benefits to customers, how the Company told the story to them, and what they really thought (Challenge: Company); and
- funding/support was now appearing on the water agenda, eg UKWIR was focusing on innovation and Ofwat had announced small incentives in the innovation area; however other regulated industries had so much more support/incentives/funding.

8. Community Update

Louise Hunter (LH) said the Company was heading into a new world of C-MeX and a review of the Company social purpose and community activity was required to assess if it is fit for purpose/the need to shout louder.

Members noted that it was important for the review to take place and that there was a big push with regulated industries on social issues. They felt it was appropriate to see areas of work being brought together and was a very logical approach.

Community offering/Foundation

With regard to the Company community offering members made the following challenges:

- the offering needed to be right for the groups/communities they were working with;

-
- the Company needed to make sure that what it was offering was what was wanted, currently the Just an Hour initiative was a great format however voluntary groups did not always want a team to paint/garden/etc;
 - the strategy needed to be aligned with what the Company was able to offer, using the skills and knowledge its employees already had; and
 - different models needed exploring such as BT, Greggs and others.

With regard to a Foundation members noted:

- Community Foundations could be seen as elite, serving the charities/community initiatives which know how to apply; and
- a Foundation could give the Company the opportunity to offer its innovation/environment skills, making it a skills platform rather than a funding platform.

Members noted that when setting up the Foundation the Company needed to:

- bring together all their community/charitable giving into one joined-up place;
- balanced over geography and the population, eg taking account of the Essex & Suffolk operating area;
- focus on keeping it as simple as possible, making sure it linked to improvements for customers; and
- ensure there was no conflict with any other campaign messages such as the Water Without the Worry messaging.

Members noted that whilst the work the Company did on hydration and schools was essential, the Company messaging should be more broadly focused, such as with the elderly. LH said the Company was currently talking to the NHS about use of refillable bottles. The aim was to have this up and running in the next few months, the Company would keep members informed of the plans and the launch. (Action: Company).

Members noted that the way the Company communicated with customers had fundamentally changed, social media had changed the way it communicated its messages enabling it to reach a wider audience - for example:

- using case studies such as the Water Rangers scheme, empowering the Rangers to use their own social media to showcase their work;
- employees using their own Facebook to share messages; and
- using partner organisations social media.

Members made the following challenges to the Company:

- it should give a balanced approach in its use of case studies in its reporting on performance to ensure that any contribution/community giving was not confused with how the Company performed especially for those areas where it could receive a financial reward for good performance.
- the ODI should not lead the Company's social work as this this could adversely impact its commitments;
- it should balance the partnerships/community needs against its budget, ie what it was able to offer – remembering that it was customers' money.

Challenges and actions have been added to the log.

Historic Museums

Members noted that one area the Company had changed its approach was with its museum partners. By changing the governance, museums were empowered to use the Company's annual donation as seed funding and then able look at other areas of income. This approach would be taken forward with the Company's community strategy.

Benchmarking

Members noted that the Company was keen to benchmark itself against leaders in corporate responsibility. The Company is keen to see which trackers were available, it was currently a BiTC Responsible Business forerunner and would be reviewing other options on what looks good in the wider business arena.

Following the meeting, members broke the meeting for a Customer Engagement workshop this was then followed by members meeting review in camera. A summary of this review, this is in Appendix 1.