

Item 6 Development Committee 6 December 2023

Email Response to Questions Raised by Todmorden Town Council From Kellie Foster, Yorkshire Water

Background

Cllr Steve Martin and I had a video pre-meeting with Ms Kellie Foster of Yorkshire Water to let her know the issues we've had in Todmorden.

Her initial response to the issues we raised is below. Hopefully she will provide more information about these issues at our meeting on 6 December.

1. Priority Services Register

The Priority Services Register (PSR) is a free to join register where anyone who is vulnerable can join. The PSR is free to join, but due to data protection legislation we are frustratingly unable to have a joined up approach with, for example, local authorities. This means that often individuals assume that they're on the PRS if, for example, they have a blue badge, when in reality they're not.

If you know of any individuals who would benefit from being on the PRS, please direct them to our website here, or ask them to call our PSR team on 0800 138 7878.

The PSR is tailored to the needs of our customers, but examples of the benefits of being on the register include having bills in large print or braille, audio bills, advance notice of planned works, allowing someone else to manage their accounts and setting up a password so they can be confident they're speaking with Yorkshire Water. Additionally, although we will provide bottled water for anyone when a supply is off, this is usually put in a central location. If necessary, we can hand deliver bottled water and even take it in to a persons home etc. If a customer has an idea of what they will need, they can speak to us and we will accommodate it if possible.

Examples of those who can join the PSR are the elderly, those with young children in the household, individuals with physical or mental health disabilities and anyone else with a vulnerability.

2. Event Duration Monitoring (EDM)

We discussed Event Duration Monitoring and our increasing transparency about Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) discharges. I wanted therefore to provide some information on CSO use as well as EDM.

Whilst storm overflows have been in use for many decades, since well before the sewer network entered private ownership, society is no longer content with their use and Government, regulators and the water sector have responded to that change in expectations.

As you may be aware, combined sewers collect both sewage and surface water. This means that when a large amount of surface water enters the network, such as during heavy rainfall events, the overflows act as a release valve to avoid effluent backing up into homes and businesses.

At present there is no alternative to the use of overflows which act as a relief valve for the network. Without their use the network would be overwhelmed and that would cause the waste to back up into streets and homes.

Unfortunately, Yorkshire Water have a disproportionately high number of CSOs. Between Yorkshire Water and United Utilities (who cover the Northwest, including Manchester, Liverpool, the Lake District etc) we have over 50% of all storm overflows in the country, however we only serve ~22% of the national population. Yorkshire Water have not paid dividends to shareholders since 2017, further our CEO has refused her bonus this year (this is her first year in post). Although I agree we have been too slow to tackle this problem, I hope that this helps to demonstrate that we're committed to doing so.

There is a misapprehension that discharges from overflows have increased dramatically in recent years. Instead, the recording of discharges has increased as we have installed Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) devices on our network.

At Yorkshire Water we have some of the best monitoring in the industry, with 98.1% of Yorkshire's overflows already monitored, and we will have 100% coverage by the end of the year. That is compared to an industry average of 89%.

Increased monitoring has led to a significant rise in the number of recorded discharges, rather than the number of actual discharges. The distinction is important because whilst any discharge to rivers may be unacceptable to our customers it does not mean that the situation has deteriorated.

Recognising the public desire for increased transparency, we have joined the wider water sector in a commitment for near-to live reporting of Combined Sewer Overflow data by January 2024. This is ahead of the timeline set down by Government. The data is near-to live because there will be an approximately 1-hour gap before publication while we verify the data.

Although I need to flag that this is not yet fully updated, you can see monitoring of what we have set up online at [Yorkshire Water Event Duration Monitoring Dashboard \(arcgis.com\)](#)

3. Further work

I am waiting for more information on the other things we discussed at the meeting (the problems with Lidl, details of any investment in Todmorden, putting information in to bills etc) and I will keep in touch with you about these matters.

We also spoke about improving our communication with Todmorden more generally. Please save my contact details and feel free to contact me regarding any specific issues, but you can also contact the wider Public Affairs team on PublicAffairsTeam@YorkshireWater.co.uk – our team can be your first point of call for any issues and we'd be happy to find out more information if you're better off speaking with a different team we can put you in touch.

Susan Miles

Assistant Town Clerk

22 November 2023