

**Minutes of 5th WIRS UCP Forum
Lloyd's Register EMEA, Coventry on 6th May 2008**

Attendees:

Louise Boccaccini - Primeshade
Paul Combes - Primeshade
Roger Collier - Bethell Power Solutions
John Snelling - Pipework GB
Frank MacDonald - Energetics Design and Build
John Hodge - Integrated Utility Services

Martyn Speight - LR EMEA
Keith Bird - LR EMEA

Apologies - John Hopkins - Morgan Est
Gary Morgan - Infrastructure Gateway
Kevin Ogden - Barhale

Minutes of Meeting

1. Review of;

- a) the notes of the WIRS SLO Forum held on 15 January 08
- b) the minutes of the WIRSAP meetings on 12 March 08

1.1 Designer Training

Although, in conjunction with EUS, a structured training programme for WIRS designers is starting to be developed it is proving difficult to identify training providers who are currently offering courses covering mains and service design. Hence it has not been possible to arrange for anyone to attend the Forum to discuss currently available training.

1.2 Proposal For Allowing UCP To Make Mains Connections

Whilst Ofwat is proposing that water companies make the making of mains connections by UCPs a contestable activity there has been no further development of this proposal. Ideally an opportunity to pilot the drafted procedure should be found and possibilities for doing this identified.

1.3 Ownership of Pre-start Meetings

Although the Forum accepted that water companies control of pre-start meetings was tied to the national self-lay agreement this restriction is a significant issue for UCPs. As the issue has not been resolved to the satisfaction of UCPs in the WIRSAP discussion it merits being raised, along with other concerns about the terms of the national agreement, in responses to the coming Ofwat self-lay consultation

1.4 Water Company Control Of The Delivery Process

Concern was expressed about the way that water companies respond to requests for activities such as mains connections as isolated activities and therefore progress matters on a 'one step at a time' basis rather than co-ordinated planning of all related activities.

Related to this water companies performance targets often do not cover activities beyond the design stage and it is not thought that company performance targets are being complied with.

It was noted with interested that Ofwat have indicated that they intend to monitor water company performance against their targets and it was hoped that their findings will be made public.

Martyn Speight reported that, in response to the discussion at the last WIRSAP about water companies not clearly indicating their response times and contact arrangements, he has suggested that, as a quick fix, each water company should prepare a single sheet table providing this information. This proposal was welcomed and water companies were urged to progress implementation.

2. Feedback On The Operation Of WIRS

No issues were reported concerning the operation of WIRS

3. Feedback From Recent Assessments

Martyn Speight reported on some of the issues identified during recent assessments

3.1 Designs

Whilst in most areas the provisions of designs is a water company issue UCPs need to ensure that they are provided with drawings which adequately detail

- the work to be done (in terms of sizes and materials)
- the arrangements for service connections (including multiple supplies/manifolds)
- where the interface is with the work being done by the water company

These issues being heightened when:-

- a) the site is multi phased and the drawing being used does not identify what has already been laid
- b) the UCP is just doing service laying and does not have access to an 'as laid' drawing

3.2 Method Statements

Where new methods of working are being introduced UCPs need to ensure that they have updated their method statements to cover any new techniques or materials. This deficiency commonly arises when barrier pipe is being used.

3.3 Equipment For PE Pipe Jointing

UCPs do not always have available on site either a shelter or pipe preparation tool (covering all the pipe sizes being used). These need to be used for the work to be done in accordance with the water industry specification.

A further issue with PE pipe is that 'short' stub flanges are being purchased when they make it extremely difficult for operatives to clamp joints.

3.4 Competency Assessments

Although it is understandable why the current training emphasis is on operatives gaining the Network Construction Operations (Water) NVQ UCPs need to ensure that

their competency assessment process looks at wider training needs and continue beyond the NVQ being achieved.

3.5 Documented Approval of Variations

Whilst, in most cases, there is evidence that variations are being thought through and discussed with the local water company representative, if not the designer, there is little documentation providing an audit trail confirming who has agreed to each variation. This exposes UCPs so they need to be proactive to protect against non approved variations leading to non acceptance of the asset by the host water company.

4. Issues of Concern To UCPs

UCPs identified the following areas where water company practices cause them concerns.

4.1 Duration Of Works

Whilst it is understandable that water companies need to restrict the time that an agreed 'point of connection' offer remains open it is thought that at least one water company is now insisting that all mainlaying in each offer must be done within 2 years. Especially in the current economic climate this is thought to be unreasonable and it was felt unlikely that similar terms would be applied to a requisition offer.

4.2 Linking Design to Construction

WIRS gives separate accreditation for design and construction but a water company is insisting that their design approval is linked to whoever is going to construct the new assets. This means that an accredited designer is not being allowed to progress design approval until a constructor has been appointed. UCPs feel that this does not accord with the WIRS scheme scopes.

5. Update Of National Self-Lay Code of Practice

Whilst a well attended initial meeting of water companies has been held to discuss progressing an update to the National Code of Practice and agreement reached that this work would be co-ordinated by WRc the project relies on all water companies agreeing to fund the work. It is currently felt that all water companies have yet to sign-up to this arrangement and therefore no progress on an update has been made.

Once the project gets underway the intention is to assess the common elements in the company specific addendums and transfer these into the national CoP. Also to be more prescriptive about the format and allowable content of company specific addendums.

Given that the WIRS Forum is uniquely positioned as providing an environment where active UCPs meet to discuss water self-lay matters it is hoped, once the updated CoP has been drafted, to ask the Forum to provide feedback on the proposals.

6. Maintaining Surveillance Visit Programme

Across all the scheme there is slippage with some UCPs in honouring their surveillance visit programme. LR have been considering this issue and recognise that it is partly due to not providing in advance a detailed visit programme. This will be addressed and it is also proposed that where UCPs do not provide opportunities for surveillance visits, or

do not have appropriate work to cover their scopes under construction, that their status will be changed to 'partial' requiring them to notify LR when their next piece of work is done. The scheme document will be updated to better indicate operating practice in such a situation.

7. Ofwat Related Matters

7.1 Feedback On Issues Raised With Ofwat

It is known that Ofwat has, since the last Forum, followed through queries raised with them by UCP which relate to water company practices which do not comply with Ofwat self-lay guidance. The Ofwat point of contact for such queries is Andrew Walker (his contact details being in the minutes of the last Forum).

7.2 Representation On Ofwat Self-Lay Group

Ofwat have reviewed the membership of their self-lay group and have created additional places for a water company representative and a representative from an active UCP nominated through the WIRS Forum.

2 people (one of whom was not at the meeting) offered to fill the UCP representative vacancy and the meeting decided to recommend John Snelling to Ofwat. [Martyn Speight to provide John's contact detail to Andrew Walker].

7.3 Ofwat Self-Lay Consultation

It is known that the Ofwat consultations on their general self-lay guidance and their financial arrangements for self-lay (and requisitioning) are progressing and should be issued during the summer (though probably now a few weeks later than originally intended). Martyn Speight expects to be told when the consultation documents are issued and he will try to keep UCPs informed.

At WIRSAP Andrew Walker has stated that along with the proposal to include the making of mains connections a 'contestable' element of work the consultation will also propose adding the making of service connections to existing water company mains to the list of 'contestable' activities.

It was suggested that, when the consultation, is underway there may be merit, in addition to preparing individual responses, for UCPs to meet to consider the proposals and related issues that they would like to see covered in the Ofwat guidance. Although such a discussion is arguably outside the scope of the WIRS Forum the regulated self-lay framework does have a significant impact on the WIRS scheme so, on this occasion, maybe appropriate. Whilst the discussion could be done at a routine Forum meeting it may be better to arrange a longer meeting time. This can be decided when the consultation dates and nature of the consultation are better known.

8. Next WIRS SLO Forum meeting

Subject to any separate discussion about the Ofwat self-lay consultation being arranged it was agreed that the next WIRS Forum should be held at the LR Coventry Office on the afternoon of Wednesday 24th September 2008 (after the next GIRS Forum). A buffet lunch will be provided before the meeting.