Complaints Procedure
How we will deal with your complaint
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1 INTRODUCTION

Who we are

The Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) was set up on 1 October 2005. We represent the interests of water and sewerage consumers in England and Wales and deal with their complaints against water and sewerage companies.

CCWater consists of:

- The Council’s Board has 11 members. This comprises the Council Chair, Chief Executive Officer, five members who are local Committee Chairs, four independent members who have no regional or Welsh affiliation.

- The Regional and Welsh Committees that support the Council across England and Wales reflecting the structure of the water and sewerage companies. There are four England committees and one Wales committee, supported by eight English and a Welsh offices.

What we do

We represent the interests of all water and sewerage consumers. One of our main responsibilities is to help consumers (households and businesses) with complaints that they have been unable to resolve with their water companies. Our regional and Welsh offices deal with these at a local level and have specific knowledge of your local water company’s policies and procedures.

The aims of our complaints procedures

In dealing with individual consumer complaints, we aim to:

- provide a complaint handling service with simple procedures and clear responsibilities that has the confidence of both consumers and companies;
- resolve complaints promptly and in a fair and reasonable way;
- resolve complaints against published standards and targets, securing an appropriate remedy for the consumer from the company;
- keep consumers informed about the progress of their complaint and give full reasons for any decisions;
- tell consumers what further action they can take if they are not satisfied with our handling of their complaint;
- ensure that consumers are well informed of their rights and the responsibilities of water companies regarding their complaint; and
- ensure that any personal information is used and protected properly.
2 IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT ABOUT YOUR WATER AND/OR SEWERAGE SERVICE

In the first instance, you should complain to your water company and give them a chance to put your problem right. All companies must have an Ofwat (the water industry’s economic regulator) approved complaint procedure. These procedures are available on request from the company or on their websites. Most water companies have a two-stage written complaint procedure. If you are still unhappy with the service you have received after the first company reply, you should contact the company again and ask for a review of your complaint at a higher stage. If you remain unhappy with your water company’s response after completing its complaints procedures you should then contact us.

3 HOW TO CONTACT US

By letter: Where possible, please put your complaint in writing. This will ensure we have a clear record of the reasons for your dissatisfaction and what outcome you would like to see to resolve the complaint. If it is difficult for you to write then please call us, and a member of our staff will write a summary and ask you to confirm that it is accurate.

Electronically: You can register your complaint, make an enquiry or search for answers to frequently asked questions via the Consumer Support area of our website at www.ccwater.org.uk. Our website includes information about how to send us an email directly.

By telephone: You can contact us on a local rate or geographical number at each of our offices. If we are not able to take your call, leave a message on our answering machine. A member of staff will call you back as soon as possible.

By fax: Each office has its own fax number.

In person: Our offices welcome consumers who wish to discuss their complaint in person. Please contact your local office before visiting to ensure a staff member is available to meet with you.

Via a third party: We would generally need your consent in writing before we can deal with a third party acting as your representative.

In languages other than English: All offices have access to a telephone interpretation service for consumers who cannot speak English. This covers over 140 languages.

You can find details of where to contact us at the end of this document.
HOW WE CAN HELP

Complaints about water and sewerage companies

If you remain dissatisfied after going through your water and/or sewerage company’s complaint procedure then you should contact our office that deals with your company. Contact details for each office and the companies they cover are at the end of this document. As contact levels to us can vary, we may sometimes tell you that one of our other offices can take up your complaint more quickly. We can share company-specific information across our organisation.

Referring your complaint back to the water and sewerage companies

Companies should have an opportunity to put things right before we become directly involved. If your complaint has not exhausted all stages of your company’s complaint procedure, we may encourage you to contact your company directly. If you need assistance, we will be happy to forward your complaint to your company on your behalf.

We will record your complaint then request that your company provide us a copy of their response for us to consider. If you have written or emailed us, we will send you a letter or email explaining what we have done within five working days of receipt of your correspondence. We will send you and the company copies of all relevant correspondence.

Your water company should respond no later than the tenth working day from receipt of your initial complaint letter. This is a guaranteed standard of service, which is legally binding and laid down by the government, usually referred as the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS). If a company fails to respond within that time then you will be entitled to compensation, usually £20. More information about GSS is available on the CCWater website.

If you remain dissatisfied once the complaint has exhausted the company’s complaint procedure please get back in touch with your local CCWater office. Our staff will then advise you of the next steps.

On some occasions, we will reply directly to you, without referring to your water company for example, if your complaint involves a matter of law, an established policy or if we are unable to assist you.

What happens when we investigate complaints?

If you have exhausted your company’s complaint procedure, we will either begin an investigation or reply to you directly, explaining why an investigation is inappropriate. We may request additional information from you and the company to help us complete our investigation. If we investigate, we will keep you informed throughout the process. We will normally send you and the company copies of all correspondence.
CCWater aims to resolve complaints as quickly as possible but cases that are more complex can take time. Our targets are to resolve 70% of cases within 20 working days and 85% within 40 working days.

What can we achieve for you when we investigate complaints?

We will try to identify the cause of service failures and consider whether the actions taken by the company are adequate and appropriate as a resolution to the complaint. Remedies may vary from an explanation, an apology, compensation or in some cases, substantial engineering operational works.

We will recommend that your company considers redress where we feel it is appropriate. We have no legal powers to force water companies pay compensation. The Guaranteed Standards Scheme outlines the only legally binding compensation that water companies have to pay.

We are not able and do not have powers to act as loss adjusters in deciding a claim for damages or similar loss. If you are not happy with the company’s offer regarding any such loss you may have to pursue the matter through the small claims court. However, we will try to assist consumers wherever possible to resolve such cases directly with companies.

In some cases we may identify the need for a company to change its policy or practice and we will work with and challenge (where necessary) the company to bring this about.

If you decide to seek resolution or compensation via the courts, we will normally conclude our investigation, though we can continue to offer advice on customer service related matters.

We want to hear what you think of the service we provide

We want to know what you thought about the way we handled your complaint. If you provide us with your phone number, when your case is closed a professional market research company may telephone you and conduct a short survey. Your feedback enables us to improve our service to consumers. Your contact details are kept confidential and only used for our own survey. Let us know if you prefer that we do not contact you.

Complaints or enquiries about licensed water suppliers

Non-household customers who use 50 megalitres of water each year may purchase their water from new entrants licensed to access the distribution networks of the water undertakers. The licensed companies will also be able to buy water wholesale from water undertakers for onward retail sale.

While CCWater has a statutory duty to represent the interests of all consumers, our involvement with licensed water supplier customers is more limited.

We will not become involved in disputes concerning the contractual terms and conditions between a licensed water supplier and customers. Although CCWater does not have
statutory powers to investigate such complaints, we will consider non-contractual issues and customer service. We will also deal with enquiries from any customer who is considering changing supplier. Our office in Birmingham handles these matters.

Complaints we cannot deal with

Consumer Council for Water offices can only deal with complaints about the customer service of companies while offering their water and sewerage services. We generally cannot deal with the following:

- The quality of rivers, lakes and estuaries or coastal water pollution. The Environment Agency is the organisation responsible for these complaints. If you wish to find out more their website is www.environment-agency.gov.uk. You can contact them on their general enquiries line on 08708 506 506 or report a pollution incident on 0800 807 060.

- Matters that would be better dealt with through the courts or arbitration such as legal issues and claims for damages. We will always try to help consumers where we can.

- Disputes that fall under the jurisdiction of the water industry regulatory, Ofwat. Examples of such disputes include:
  - Costs and conditions set by the water company for connection to a water main
  - Company refusal to install a free meter for a domestic customer because it is not practical and too expensive to install
  - The charges or disconnection costs that must be paid to a company before a business customer’s supply is reconnected; and
  - Company refusal to allow private sewer and drain connections to public sewers
  - Sewerage company allegedly not draining its area effectually

If you are unsure if we can help with your matter, please contact us. In the event that we believe another organisation other than the water company may be able to deal with your complaint, we will ask you first if we can forward it on. Please let us know if you do not want us to do this.

All consumers’ details remain confidential and we only use them to resolve your complaint or improve our service.
COMPLAINTS ABOUT US

If you are not happy with our service, please let us know.

If you are dissatisfied with how we handled your complaint

If you are dissatisfied with how we handled your complaint about a water company, you can ask the regional or Welsh Committee Chair to review the matter. The Chair will review our handling of the complaint by our office staff but will not focus on the outcome offered by the company unless our handling affected it. Once the Chair carries out their review, they will write to you telling you what further action, if any, CCWater can take to resolve your complaint.

If you remain dissatisfied after the Regional or Welsh Committee Chair’s review

If you are still unhappy once the Regional or Welsh Committee Chair has reviewed your complaint, you may ask the chair to refer the matter to an independent review panel, which consists of:

- The CCWater Chief Executive (or his designate) and
- an independent CCWater Board member who has no affiliation with our offices.

The independent review panel will write to you outlining their conclusions and what further action, if any, the CCWater can take to resolve your complaint.

If you remain dissatisfied after the independent review

If you remain dissatisfied after the independent review of your complaint, you can ask your MP to refer the matter to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO).

The PHSO’s role is to investigate complaints referred by MPs from members of the public who feel they have suffered an injustice through poor administration by government departments and certain public organisations. The PHSO is independent of the government and the organisations it investigates. The PHSO has wide-ranging powers to investigate complaints. Their services are free. For further details, you can contact the PHSO’s helpline on 0345 015 4033 or write to:

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP
Website: www.ombudsman.org.uk
E-mail: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk
Complaints about individual CCWater Staff Members

You can refer your complaint about CCWater staff to CCWater’s Human Resources Manager or Head of Corporate Services who will arrange for your complaint to be investigated and appropriate action taken. If you remain unhappy with the response, you can ask for an independent senior manager to review the matter.

Complaints about CCWater Board Members

You can refer complaints about the Board or the Regional or Welsh Committees or its members to CCWater’s Board Secretary in our Birmingham office. As Board members are public appointees, you can refer any unresolved complaint to Defra or the Welsh Assembly.

6 COMPLAINTS RELATING TO INFORMATION REQUESTS

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests

CCWater aims to be an open and transparent organisation. Where possible we will make available our information by placing it on our website. Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) which came into effect on 1 January 2005 people have the right to request certain information held by public bodies. We will respond to most requests for information within 20 working days.

How we will deal with FOI requests

The Freedom of Information Officer at our Birmingham office deals with FOI requests. Please put your request in writing giving as much detail as possible about the information you require.

Reviewing FOI decisions

If a request for information is refused, and you remain unhappy with the response, you can ask for an independent senior manager to review the decision.

Complaining to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO)

If following an internal review, we uphold the decision not to give information then you have a right of appeal to the ICO. You can contact them on 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545 745 or write to:

Information Commissioner’s Office
Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF
Website: www.ico.gov.uk
## Consumer Council for Water Contact Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer Council for Water Birmingham - for customers of Severn Trent Water and South Staffordshire Water</th>
<th>Consumer Council for Water Exeter- for customers of South West Water</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Floor, Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham, B2 4AJ</td>
<td>9th Floor, Renslade House, Bonhay Road, Exeter EX4 3AW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 0121 345 1013, Local rate: 08457 023953, Fax: 0121 345 1010 E-mail: <a href="mailto:central@ccwater.org.uk">central@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 8.30 to 4.30, Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Phone: 01392 428028 Local rate: 08457 959059 Fax: 01392 428010 E-mail: <a href="mailto:southwest@ccwater.org.uk">southwest@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 8.30 to 4.30, Monday to Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ground Floor, Carlyle House, Carlyle Road Cambridge, CB4 3DN</td>
<td>c/o First Floor Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham, B2 4AJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 01223 323889 Local rate: 08457 959369, Fax: 01223 323930 E-mail: <a href="mailto:eastern@ccwater.org.uk">eastern@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 8.30 to 4.30, Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Phone: 020 7931 8502 Local rate: 08457 581658, Fax: 0121 345 1010 E-mail: <a href="mailto:londonandsoutheast@ccwater.org.uk">londonandsoutheast@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 9 to 5, Monday to Friday</td>
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<tr>
<th>Consumer Council for Water Darlington- for customers of Northumbrian Water, Yorkshire Water and Hartlepool Water</th>
<th>Consumer Council for Water Cardiff - for customers of Dwr Cymru Welsh Water and Dee Valley Water</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eighth Floor, Northgate House, St Augustine’s Way, Darlington, DL1 1XA</td>
<td>Room 140, Caradog House, 1-6 St Andrew’s Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 01325 464222 Local rate: 08457 089367, Fax: 01325 369269 E-mail: <a href="mailto:northumbria@ccwater.org.uk">northumbria@ccwater.org.uk</a> or <a href="mailto:yorkshire@ccwater.org.uk">yorkshire@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 9 to 5, Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Phone: 029 2023 9852 Local rate: 08457 078267, Fax: 029 2023 9847 E-mail: <a href="mailto:wales@ccwater.org.uk">wales@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 8.30 to 4.30, Monday to Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suite 902, Ninth Floor, Bridgewater House Whitworth Street, Manchester, M1 6LT</td>
<td>2 The Hide Market, West Street, St Philips, Bristol, BS2 0BH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 0161 236 6112 Local rate: 08457 056316, Fax: 0161 228 6117 E-mail: <a href="mailto:northwest@ccwater.org.uk">northwest@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 9 to 5, Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Phone: 0117 955 7001 Local rate: 08457 078268, Fax: 0117 955 7037 E-mail: <a href="mailto:wessex@ccwater.org.uk">wessex@ccwater.org.uk</a> Office hours: 8.30 to 4.30, Monday to Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Floor, Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham, B2 4AJ</td>
<td>If you call (on the phone number or local rate number) outside office hours, you can leave a message on our answerphone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: 0121 345 1000 Local rate: 0845 039 2837 Fax: 0121 345 1001 Website: <a href="http://www.ccwater.org.uk">www.ccwater.org.uk</a> E-mail: <a href="mailto:enquiries@ccwater.org.uk">enquiries@ccwater.org.uk</a></td>
<td>If you are a textphone (minicom) user, you can contact us on 0121 345 1044</td>
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