

CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR



CYNGOR DEFNYDDWYR



# CCWater Written Complaint Assessments Overview

2017/18

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
	<p>The Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) is the statutory body that represents the interests of consumers of the regulated water and water and wastewater companies in England and Wales. We operate through five committees, four in England and one in Wales.</p> <p>The number of customer complaints companies receive and how well they deal with them provides a strong indication of a company's customer service performance. We report on company complaints annually, commending companies that have few complaints and criticising the industry outliers that receive a disproportionately high number of complaints or show a deteriorating service on previous years.</p> <p>We undertake written complaint assessments as part of our work in holding poorer performing companies to account. Our Assessment Panels consists of a small CCWater team drawn from Local Consumer Advocates (LCAs), Consumer Relations and sometimes Policy staff. The panel will visit companies, review 25 complaints and provide feedback to companies, acting as a 'critical friend', identifying and sharing areas of good practice and providing advice on areas in which we feel they could do better.</p> <p>This report provides an overview of the 2017-18 written complaint assessments we carried out.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Written Complaint Assessment Process</b>
	<p>We select companies for assessment based on their performance highlighted in our annual complaint report. A company is considered 'at risk' through the following three factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the number of written complaints they received (normalised by the number of connected properties);</li> <li>• the percentage of complaints they did not resolve on first written customer contact; or</li> <li>• a significant increase in complaints on the previous year.</li> </ul> <p>We choose a random sample of 25 complaints, apportioned between billing and operational services based on the proportion of written complaints the company received for each area of service. We also select a small number of escalated complaints where the customer remains dissatisfied with the company's initial response and writes to the company again.</p> <p>On the day of the assessment, our assessment panel discusses its complaint performance, customer service initiatives and complaint handling targets for the year with the company. The assessment panel reviews the 25 complaints and marks them as either 'Good', 'Acceptable' or 'Not acceptable'.</p>

	<p>In assessing a company’s complaint handling, our panel reviews whether the company has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adhered to its own procedure;</li> <li>• responded to the customer complaint within its timescales;</li> <li>• responded to all of the points in the customer’s complaint;</li> <li>• (where applicable) considered the customer’s individual circumstances;</li> <li>• correctly signposted the customer to the next stage if the customer remains dissatisfied;</li> <li>• provided or offered the customer a copy of its complaint procedure; and</li> <li>• provided a named contact and an apology.</li> </ul> <p>The assessment panel provides its observations and recommendations to the company in a feedback session on the day.</p> <p>Following the assessment, CCWater will issue a report to the company confirming the scores and observations, and any recommendations made by the assessment panel. These recommendations are subsequently tracked and monitored for future assessments to identify improvements made.</p> <p>Companies can challenge any of the complaints the panel marks as ‘Not acceptable’. These are reviewed by Local Consumer Advocates drawn from another local committee.</p>
<p><b>3. Company performance</b></p>	
	<p>Overall, CCWater found that companies assessed in 2017-18 were dealing with the written complaints they received well. Companies were adhering to their complaint procedures, providing good responses to customers and avoiding administrative errors for most complaints.</p> <p>CCWater marked 82% of the complaints as ‘good’ or ‘acceptable’. Our assessment panels were pleased to see from some complaints that companies were actively following up after complaint resolution and keeping customers informed. Cases marked as ‘Needs improvement’ tended to be for minor issues rather than more serious underlying problems.</p> <p>Assessment panels also noticed companies avoided making excuses in the event of a service failure and worked to put the matter right for the customer. In addition, the quality of written responses was high in the tone of the letter and covering the points made by customers.</p> <p>Companies provided comprehensive information on the selected cases, which included evidence of staff asking their colleagues to check that all of a customer’s points had been addressed. Companies also demonstrated a good understanding of the complaint reporting processes.</p>

<b>4.</b>	<b>Good company practice</b>
	<p>In 2017/18 CCWater assessment panels identified six areas of good practice. Some were broad, such as training, keeping the customer informed throughout the process and follow up calls to customers. Our assessment panels identified two specific areas of good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a company adopting the better procedures from each of two teams from different areas of the merging business; and</li> <li>• a ‘missed opportunity’ feedback form which identified areas of customer dissatisfaction to help reduce employee or administrative errors.</li> </ul> <p>Where we feel that a company would benefit from good practice identified at another company we will raise it as a recommendation or a suggestion at other assessments. Good practice is not always a case of one-size fits all but we have seen over the years companies learning from others and adopting similar policies and procedures which result in written complaints reducing.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Assessment panel recommendations</b>
	<p>We commend companies when we see them perform well or adopt good initiatives in their complaint handling. Where we think there is room for improvement we will make recommendations. It is at the companies’ discretion whether or not they adopt any of our assessment panel recommendations, although they often do so, and benefit from doing so.</p> <p>Overall the companies we assessed performed well. Our assessment panels only made five recommendations although on a few companies were considered ‘At risk’. Similar to previous years, there were some administrative issues such as companies not providing or offering a copy of their complaint procedure, or not covering all a customer’s points in the reply.</p> <p>Where we feel a company can benefit from another companies’ good practice our panel will make a recommendation or share it with the industry. Specific recommendations made in the year were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include more follow up on customer complaints when the company said it would do something, have a better record of what it did and when it did it;</li> <li>• Be mindful of automated messages which offer one specific timescale - enquiries and complaints had different timescales for companies to respond; and</li> <li>• Have a process to better recognise what is a complaint - which is an expression of dissatisfaction - or an enquiry - which would be a request for information.</li> </ul>

6.	Conclusion
	<p>The industry is showing improvement and is reducing the number of written complaints. Over the last few years they have adopted several innovations, such as more use of social media and webchat as well as better identifying and addressing the root causes of complaints.</p> <p>Assessments are valuable to CCWater as they provide an opportunity to visit the company and see first-hand evidence of how they deal with complaints on a day to day basis.</p> <p>In the future we will be looking to see how we can update the assessment process to better target new service areas.</p> <p>We will also look to adapt the assessments to take into account new contact channels and possibly target specific areas of service where problems have been identified. This will offer a fresh perspective on areas of customer service from companies we do not usually focus on as much. With previous areas of good practice and recommendations becoming normal practice for companies, evolving the process will help deliver improvements in new areas of customer service.</p>