



CCWater Written Complaint Assessments Overview

2018/19

1	Introduction

	<p>Since its creation in 2005 as the industry watchdog, the Consumer Council for Water has challenged the water companies in England and Wales to improve their service and deliver value for money to customers.</p> <p>A significant area of our work involves complaints which we involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers who complaint to us about their water company; and • Complaint information reported by companies where we identify areas of concern and raise with the companies what they are doing to address their service issues. <p>Written complaint assessments complement this work. We visit companies, review a sample of written complaints, make recommendations and share good practice with the rest of the industry.</p> <p>Our assessments review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether the company has adhered to its own complaint procedure; • the quality of the company responses and whether it has addressed the customer’s concerns and signposted to the next stage; and • if the company has dealt with the complaint within its own or regulatory timescale. <p>This report is an overview of the written complaint assessments we carried out in 2018/19.</p> <p>In the previous year, most companies performed quite well on written complaints with only four reporting an increase on the previous year. Two of these were single figure percentage increases.</p>
2.	<p>The assessment process</p>
	<p>We assess companies we consider ‘at risk’ based on their performance in our annual complaint report. This is based on three measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A high proportion of written complaints normalised by the number of domestic properties the company serves. 2. An increase in the number of written complaints the company has received from the previous year. 3. Above the industry average for the number of complaints which where the customer wrote to the company again and the issue was dealt with at the second stage of the company procedure. <p>The company provides CCWater with a list of written complaints it has received in the calendar year. From this list CCWater selects a random sample of complaints about billing and operational complaints, based on the proportion the company received in the annual complaint report which the company then prepare ahead of the assessment day. The company also provides CCWater with an update of the number of complaints it has received</p>

	<p>in the year and initiatives it has or intends to implement in the future to improve its customer service.</p> <p>On the assessment day, CCWater visits the company and discusses with the company its initiatives included in the information it presented prior to the assessment. The assessment panel then reviews the complaints and marks them based on whether it considered the company handling ‘good’, ‘acceptable’ or ‘not acceptable’.</p> <p>We consider the positives and negative aspects of the company complaint handling, explaining in detail why a company was marked ‘not acceptable’ but also highlighting good practice where it is evident.</p> <p>For complaint assessments, our panels review complaints on set questions under straight yes or no criteria. In the event a company fails to meet any of the criteria, they are marked down from ‘good’ to ‘acceptable’ or ‘not acceptable’. This ensures we assess all complaints consistently. The questions consider whether the company has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adhered to its written complaint procedure and published timescales; • responded to all of the points in the customer’s complaint; and • considered the customer’s individual circumstances. <p>On the day itself, we inform the company of its score and provide general feedback. We subsequently write a report and share it with the company and give it the opportunity to challenge any of the assessment panel findings.</p>
3.	Observations from the assessments
	<p>A noticeable observation from the assessments in the year was that companies were less defensive when responding to complaints. From the cases assessed by panels, when companies made a mistake they apologised and put the matter right. The quality of the responses were also high.</p> <p>Just under 72% of the complaints assessed were marked either ‘good’ or ‘acceptable’ by our assessment panels. This was lower than the previous year’s figure (82%) but there were down to administrative issues rather than any systemic company failings.</p> <p>We will be reviewing the assessment process for future years. In our 2018/19 complaint report, companies broadened the reporting of communication channels to include social media, webchat, short message service and visits. Companies will also be including telephone complaints in future years which we want to capture in the assessment process. This will ensure that groups of customers will not get left behind and give CCWater an active role in helping companies improve services across the all communication channels.</p>
4.	Good company practice

	<p>We identified five areas of good practice from the assessments in the year. Two of the five areas were not evidence from previous assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘One hit’ visits where contractors would visit, assess and complete the required work there and then; • ‘In their shoes’ - when contacted, company staff consider the service failure from the perspective of the customer and deal with it as if it was their own problem. <p>In addition to the two areas of good practice, our assessment panels picked up more general areas of good practice. Examples include regular liaison with senior management and using checklists when responding to complaints to make sure all of the necessary tasks are completed.</p>
5.	Assessment panel recommendations
	<p>Our assessment panels make recommendations where we see potential areas for improvement. We do not tell companies how they should deal with complaints. However, if we feel the recommendations will deliver real benefits to customers we challenge companies to improve, especially as we see what other companies do well. Companies usually follow our recommendations. The number of assessments in the year were low so outside the general observations, our assessment panels made only two recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tighten up on the complaints process, customers were getting lost between departments; • try to pre-empt the customer contact and speak to the customer first rather than wait for the next customer contact.
6.	Conclusion
	<p>We were encouraged that we saw good practice and made recommendations on what was a quiet year for complaint assessments. For future years we will be looking to broaden this process to include all reported contact channels.</p> <p>Written complaint assessments give us a fuller picture of company customer service. They allow us to learn more about the company and ensure they are implementing the improvements they highlight in our regular meetings. They are a valuable method for us to monitor issues and record improvements.</p>