



ccw

The voice for water consumers  
Y corff sy'n rhoi llais i ddefnyddwyr dŵr

# Annual Review

for England and Wales 2019-20

[ccwater.org.uk](http://ccwater.org.uk)

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# Reflections from our Chair



**I'm delighted to welcome you to CCW's Annual Review for 2019-20. It's been a year characterised by enormous changes and challenges – whether that was securing the best deal possible for customers as the Price Review<sup>1</sup> reached its conclusion or reacting to the impact of COVID-19. I'm proud that we have continued to act as a powerful and relevant voice for water consumers every step of the way.**

Over the past year, we've assisted more than 10,000 customers with complaints against their water company, helping to return almost £1.5 million in financial redress. We've fought hard to keep the pressure on the poorest performing companies, using the wealth of data and research at our disposal to hold them to account against the best practice of their peers. The publication of our **annual customer complaints report** in September 2019 provided the catalyst for three of the four water companies we criticised to improve their performance.

Meanwhile, we remained dedicated to supporting customers in financial hardship. Our online calculator tools helped more than 2,800 low-income customers identify more than £4.2 million in additional benefits and grants to which they may be entitled. We also helped customers save water and money, with over 256,000 visits to our **water meter calculator** generating potential savings of nearly £15.6 million. In the past 12 months alone we've also helped to oversee a take-up in social tariff schemes which means almost 750,000 low-income households are now receiving reduced water bills. The importance of this work will only continue to grow in the coming year, as the financial repercussions of COVID-19 become more apparent.

Our campaign to keep consumers at the heart of the price-setting process also continued to gather pace, with our feedback on Ofwat's draft plans **informed by the views of more than 10,000 customers**. While we were pleased to see that the majority of customers in England and Wales were supportive of the five-year proposals, we raised concerns about the impact that regulatory incentives had upon customer perceptions.

<sup>1</sup> The Price Review is the five-year regulatory process that sets the limits on what water companies can charge customers and the investment and service commitments they must deliver in return.



**750,000**

low-income households receive reduced water bills

Our water meter calculator identified

**£15.6 million**

in potential bill savings

# Reflections from our Chair



**Ofwat's final package of price limits, investment and service levels in December 2019 appeared to represent a good deal for many customers over the next five years - but it's now down to companies to deliver on these commitments.**

If they do, many households can look forward to lower bills in exchange for more investment in improved services. More cash will also be pumped into safeguarding services from the growing demands of climate change and population growth. It remains to be seen whether the scale of investment is sufficient to claw back the ground that has been lost during a decade of complacency from the industry.

We also continued to be a strong advocate for business customers, whose complaints to us have risen four-fold since the vast majority of non-household customers in England were given the freedom to switch water retailer in April 2017. As we approached the market's third anniversary, there were some small signs of improvement, but complaint numbers remain a long way short of returning to pre-market levels. The fall in complaints suggests our robust and targeted challenge of poor performing retailers is beginning to pay off, and we've led the way in bringing retailers together to tackle the most common cause of complaints.

We've not been afraid to challenge ourselves to improve too with CCW making several important changes. Firstly, we launched a fresh new look and brand: **CCW – the voice for water consumers**. This change was inspired by consumers and saw us depart from the CCWater name and logo, which had remained largely unchanged since the birth of the organisation back in 2005.

We also began the process of changing the composition of CCW's Board, reducing the number of our regional committees from five to two, in order for us to hold water companies to account in a more consistent way. The piloting of our new **WaterVoice** online community - involving just over 600 consumers – will also help us to keep our finger on the pulse of people's shifting views on a wide range of topics.

All of these changes will empower us to be an even stronger advocate for consumers and ensure we react quickly to the most pressing issues that threaten to cause detriment to customers. That will be of enormous importance as the industry adapts to the considerable economic and social challenges that emerge in the wake of COVID-19.

**Rob Light** Chair, CCW

WaterVoice  
online community  
involved  
**600**  
consumers

A graphic shaped like a water drop, with a dark blue background and white text. It contains the text 'WaterVoice online community involved' followed by the large number '600' and the word 'consumers' at the bottom.





The voice for water consumers  
Y corff sy'n rhoi llais i ddefnyddwyr dŵr

CCW exists to champion the interests of all water consumers in England and Wales and our work as the independent, statutory consumer body for the water sector is enormously varied.

Every day we provide advice to people on their water and sewerage services and support customers with complaints that they have been unable to resolve with their supplier. Since 2005 we've handled about 400,000 complaints and enquiries and helped to return £31 million in financial redress to household and business customers.

We delve deep into consumers' views on water companies and the essential services they provide by carrying out a wide range of research. Tracking people's attitudes on issues including protecting the environment, saving water and drinking water quality helps us to influence the water industry, regulators and governments in England and Wales to ensure they make decisions that reflect consumers' priorities and concerns.

Our understanding of water consumers' views also helps us to play a key role in the industry's five-year price-setting process so that the regulator Ofwat and water companies listen to what customers want and deliver a package that reflects the quality of services they expect, at a price they find acceptable.

Since 2005  
we've handled  
about  
**400,000**  
complaints and  
enquiries

Helped to  
return  
**£31 million**  
in financial  
redress

Key role in the  
industry's  
**5 - Year**  
price setting  
process

# Our Priorities

Our work flowed out of four major themes that consumers told us they wanted us to focus our efforts on. The Annual Review sets out what we were able to achieve for consumers within these work streams.

Our four strategic priorities for consumers were:

1



Advocate for **affordable charges** that all current and future consumers see as fair and value for money

2



Challenge companies to provide their service **right first time**, protect household and business consumers when things go wrong and provide an easy-to-access service for all

3



Press companies for **safe, reliable water and wastewater services** that all consumers can trust now, and in the long term

4



Shape the water sector by **informing and engaging** all consumers so that consumers' voices are acted upon by decision makers and the industry

## What we delivered – at a glance

We cost each bill payer in England and Wales around 22p to deliver a huge range of benefits for consumers during 2019-20, which included:



**More than £15 million** the potential bill savings thousands of households were able to identify through using our **water meter calculator**.



**Just over £4 million** in potential welfare payments that thousands of cash-strapped households may be able to claim after using our **Benefits Calculator**.



**Almost 750,000** low-income households now receiving reduced bills through water companies' social tariff schemes, which we helped the industry develop and promote.



**4 major research reports** we commissioned to broaden our understanding of consumers' views and campaign for changes from the water industry, regulators and governments.



**More than 2,000 people** supported with enquiries about their water and sewerage services.



**142 investigations** we carried out where we felt a water company or retailer's handling of a complaint had been poor and not delivered a fair outcome for the consumer.



**Nearly £1.5 Million** in financial redress that we helped to secure for consumers after resolving their complaint against a water company or water retailer.



**More than 10,000** complaints about water companies and water retailers that our consumer relations team stepped in to help consumers resolve.



## Consumer Priority: **Affordable bills and value for money**

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Advocate for affordable charges that all current and future consumers see as fair and value for money.





## Consumer Priority: Affordable bills and value for money

### Headline achievements:



**Almost 750,000 low-income households** now registered for bill reductions through water companies' social tariffs – **up 36 per cent on the previous year**. This included nearly 90,000 customers in Wales



**£4.2 million** in potential welfare benefit payments identified by households through using our Benefits Calculator



**More than £15 million** in potential bill savings identified by consumers through using our water meter calculator



# Consumer Priority: Affordable bills and value for money

## Campaigning for fair bills

**All of us want to feel that we are getting a fair deal - whether that's paying for a product in a shop or having an essential service piped to us like water. That sense of fairness is even more critical with water and sewerage services where households cannot vote with their feet and choose a different supplier.**

Consumers' perceptions of fairness can have far-reaching consequences for water companies' relationships with their customers and their efforts to build trust and satisfaction in the services they provide. We've repeatedly stressed the importance of companies doing more to prove to their customers they are getting a fair deal.

However, there remains a gulf between customers' high satisfaction with their water and sewerage services and lower levels of satisfaction with what they are charged. Our **Water Matters survey** in 2019 revealed about six out of ten households across England and Wales thought what they paid their water company was fair, despite the vast majority (9 out of 10) of customers expressing satisfaction with the service they received.

Widespread media interest in the report's publication in July 2019 gave us a strong platform to warn the industry that it could pay a high price for its complacency over fairness, which has remained static for the past eight years. In an effort to help companies get to grips with the issue, we compiled a guide on how to change

customers' perceptions on fairness and value for money. **TimetoChange** featured seven top tips linked to companies' financing, levels of service and local identity.

Simple steps like avoiding sudden bill rises or other 'nasty surprises', making every contact with customers count positively and showing bill payers how their money is being used to improve services on their street can transform people's perceptions. Companies were also urged to be more open about their financial arrangements and how these benefit customers, build a positive community image and look after every household – especially when they need extra help.

Some companies have responded well to the challenge and the prospect of lower bills for many customers over the next five years – in return for more investment in the things they care most about – can help the industry transform perceptions of fairness. However, companies must deliver on the raft of commitments they have made to customers as part of the 2019 Price Review package.



## In Wales

Our Water Matters survey in 2019 revealed customers in Wales were significantly more satisfied than households in England with most aspects of their water company, including service levels, value for money and fairness. They also scored their water company higher on levels of trust, although this was an improving picture across both countries.

We applauded the efforts of companies in Wales to maintain these consistently high scores across many measures but also highlighted areas for improvement.

Customers in Wales are less likely than those in England to contact their water company when they encounter a problem.

That suggests the companies in Wales may need to improve their communication with customers and make every contact count.



# Consumer Priority: Affordable bills and value for money

## Helping low-income households stay afloat

**No-one should face the prospect of being unable to afford something as essential as water and yet our research shows that many households do struggle. One in eight customers have consistently told us their water bill is not affordable. The damage caused to the economy by COVID-19 is only likely to intensify that pressure and leave even more households in a position where they are unable to cover the cost of basics like water.**

Our campaigning to make sure the industry provided support to customers in hardship began many years before the threat of COVID-19 loomed on the horizon. CCW has been at the forefront of expanding the schemes available to households hampered by low incomes, debt or other difficulties. The publication of our **Water for All** report in October 2019 highlighted the significant strides that water companies have made in providing a lifeline to more cash-strapped customers.

The growth of social tariffs has been central to this with CCW playing a leading role in promoting them. Some of these tariffs can reduce bills for eligible low-income households by as much as 90 per cent. Working closely with water companies and using our range of communication channels we helped to ensure almost 750,000 customers were registered for these tariffs by the end of the year – an increase of 36 per cent on 2018-19. The financial value of this support was worth in excess of £100 million. Our Water for All report also highlighted the substantial regional variations in the

number of customers receiving assistance and the levels of support on offer.

Average annual bill reductions provided through customer-subsidised social tariffs ranged from as much as £277 to as little as £22. That is largely because the impact of these schemes is constrained by companies relying on other customers' willingness to fund them. Just three companies – Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, Yorkshire Water and United Utilities – contributed some of their own profits to social tariffs but we continued to campaign for others to follow suit.

There remains a danger that support through these schemes will dry up unless more water companies dip into their pocket to help the growing number of people facing a loss of income in the wake of COVID-19. It may be that a radical rethink is needed on how financial assistance is funded in the future to make deeper inroads into eradicating water poverty. CCW has found that customers are supportive of the idea of public funding being used to help finance assistance with water bills.



## In Wales

Almost 90,000 customers in Wales were receiving support through social tariffs by the end of 2019-20 - an increase of 13 per cent on the previous year.

This still remains a long way short of tackling the scale of hardship that has left one in eight households in Wales telling us they cannot afford their water bill.

That's why we supported a proposal by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to continue to provide additional funding for its scheme over the next five years so it could assist more low-income customers.

The move was eventually backed by the regulator Ofwat in its price review settlement.

We also engaged in discussions with the company about increasing the cross-subsidy contribution from its customers from 2021-22, after reviewing the company's customer research.



## Consumer Priority: Affordable bills and value for money

### Boosting other forms of assistance

**Social tariffs are just one of the ways customers can seek help with bills as water companies also offer a range of other assistance schemes. These include WaterSure and WaterSure Wales, which can provide support to customers in specific circumstances.**

To be eligible a customer has to pay metered charges, receive certain welfare benefits and either have three or more children or have someone in the household who uses a lot of water due to a medical condition. The scheme caps a customer's bill so they don't pay a penny more than the average charge for their region.

Through our extensive work in the media and other communication channels, we helped to raise awareness of WaterSure with take-up increasing by 7 per cent during 2019-20.

More than 165,000 metered customers are now registered for help across England and Wales. The value of this support was more than £45 million.

Over the last five years there has been a 50 per cent increase in customers registered for WaterSure, despite the emergence of social tariffs.

More than  
**165,000**  
metered customers  
now registered for  
WaterSure

**50%**  
increase in  
customers  
registered for  
WaterSure in  
the last  
5 years



### In Wales

Companies are not required to offer the WaterSure scheme in Wales but do provide support for low-income customers with high essential water use. More than 16,500 metered customers received this assistance in Wales - an increase of 8 per cent on the previous year.

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water also continued to support more than 15,000 customers who met the WaterSure qualifying criteria but were not metered. The support was initially provided as part of Welsh Water Assist - a scheme which has since been phased out.







## Consumer Priority: Affordable bills and value for money

### Reaping the benefits of our online tools

One way we can ensure cash-strapped households are not swept into crisis is by making sure they don't miss out on bill savings or other income streams they be entitled to. We're always looking for ways to expand the tools and advice on our website to reduce the risk of this happening.

Four years ago we teamed up with poverty relief charity Turn2Us to launch a **Benefits Calculator** and **Grants Search Tool**. Both have the potential to unlock sources of income for people in financial hardship so they can keep their head above water.

More than 2,100 people used our Benefits Calculator to identify £4.2 million in potential benefit entitlements during 2019-20.

A further 679 people used the grants search to explore a pool of more than 3,000 charitable funds for financial assistance.

The most popular tool on our website remained our **water meter calculator**, which has helped tens of thousands of households over the years work out whether they might be better off switching to metered charges. The rise of metering means an ever-decreasing number of people

pay unmetered charges with more than half of homes now fitted with a meter.

However, there remain large numbers of customers who could still benefit from switching, particularly in properties where there are fewer occupants than bedrooms.

Our calculator makes it easy for customers to check whether it might be worth taking the plunge. Not everyone will make a saving but some customers find they can shave hundreds of pounds off their bills.

The calculator featured heavily in the national and regional media throughout the year and attracted a wave of visitors after being promoted by money-saving expert Martin Lewis on his ITV bill-busting show. It was visited more than 256,000 times and helped households identify total potential bill savings of nearly £15.6 million.



### Refunded for double charges

Mr W was acting as power of attorney for his friend, who was having issues with debt owed to his water company. He had discovered the company had been continuing to take money directly from his friend's benefits, as well as a direct debit from his bank, meaning he'd been paying twice for over a year.

The company admitted to CCW that it had mistakenly taken more payments than it should have.

It apologised and agreed to refund the additional payments, totalling more than £120.

We also managed to secure a goodwill gesture of £25 as an acknowledgement of its poor customer service.



# Consumer Priority: Affordable bills and value for money

## Widening the net of support for the most vulnerable customers

**The outbreak of COVID-19 provided a stark reminder of just how quickly our lives can change and leave us in a much more vulnerable position. These circumstances also present enormous challenges for water companies who have a responsibility to adapt swiftly to the rapidly changing needs of their customers when disruption or crisis strikes.**

Before the emergence of COVID-19 we had continued to work closely with water companies to increase the consistency and levels of support that are available to customers with a wide range of additional needs. Central to this work was the promotion of **Priority Services**, which can provide additional, free support to customers who need extra help in accessing a company's services. This is of vital importance particularly when customers suddenly experience disruption to their water supply and need a helping hand.

The number of consumers registered for help through these services rose from 420,000 in 2018-19 to just under 600,000 in 2019-20 – an increase of 42 per cent. However, the overall percentage of households on priority services registers remains a long way short of reaching the 7 per cent target, which regulator Ofwat wants to see achieved by 2025.

Greater collaboration is needed across the industry and beyond which is why we were encouraged to see so many organisations attend our affordability and vulnerability seminar in February 2020.

We explored issues including supporting and protecting consumers in longer-term and transient vulnerable circumstances, the role of utility companies in protecting consumers against scams and supporting those who may be experiencing mental health problems.

Just over a month later and water companies' ability to support customers in a broad range of vulnerable circumstances was severely tested by the outbreak of COVID-19 and resulting lockdown. One of the most pressing concerns was ensuring companies reacted quickly to identifying the need and providing the financial or practical support customers needed to weather the storm.

We worked closely with Water UK<sup>2</sup> and companies as they developed a sector-wide agreement on a series of immediate support measures to address the range of potential vulnerabilities arising from the health crisis.

This work will continue deep into 2020 as we support the sector's efforts in establishing plans that can help customers navigate the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on their lives and finances.

<sup>2</sup> Water UK is a membership organisation that represents the major statutory water and sewerage companies in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.



**42%**  
increase in  
consumers  
registering  
for Priority  
Services





## Consumer Priority: **Affordable bills and value for money**

### Keeping a lid on our costs

**Consumers have a right to expect value for money not just from water companies but from CCW, which is funded through their water bills.**

It cost £5.78 million to cover the cost of the broad range of services we provided to consumers during 2019-20. That equates to a charge of 22p for each bill payer in England and Wales – just a penny more than what we cost each household in 2011-12.

We have consistently kept our costs low by identifying savings that help us absorb inflationary pressures, while still investing in our services. You can read more in our [Annual Report and Accounts](#).



It cost  
each  
customer

**22p**

to fund CCW's  
services  
in 2019-20







## Consumer Priority: **Right first time**

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Challenge companies to provide their services **RIGHT FIRST TIME**, protect household and business consumers when things go wrong and provide an easy-to-access service for all.





## Consumer Priority: Right first time

### Headline achievements:



**Sustained our pressure on poor performing water companies and water retailers** through our extensive media work and collaboration with sector partners



Supported households and businesses in handling more than **12,000 complaints and enquiries** about their water and sewerage services – including **more than 140 investigations** into the most serious cases



**Secured £1.5 million in financial redress** for customers that were let down by their water company or water retailer



# Consumer Priority: Right first time

## Holding poor performing water retailers to account

**Unlike household customers who are not able to switch their supplier, the vast majority of business customers in England have had the freedom to shop around for a better deal since April 2017.**

That's when the non-household retail water market in England was opened up to increased competition and a stream of new water retailers began competing for the provision of services including billing, meter reading and customer service handling. Wholesale services – including the treatment and transport of tap water and wastewater – continued to be provided by the existing regional water companies.

Increased competition promised to herald a new era of improved services tailored to meet the needs of individual business customers, coupled with the prospect of potential bill savings. Some customers have reaped the benefits while nine out of ten switchers told us they were satisfied with the process of changing supplier.<sup>3</sup> But for too many small businesses the market has triggered a wave of dissatisfaction and difficulties that have resulted in a surge of complaints.

While CCW received four times more complaints from business customers in 2019-20 than before the market opened, there were at least some small signs of recovery towards the end of the year. For the first time since the market opened we witnessed an overall fall in complaints in 2019-20, as our robust challenge of a small group of poor performing retailers began to bear fruit. Each quarter we highlighted the best and worst performing retailers on complaints performance and used this to publicly sustain the pressure on those that needed to urgently improve. Our consumer relations team also continued to meet regularly with retailers to discuss

areas of concern and how best to tackle the underlying causes of complaints.

Among the worst performers was Water Plus, which accounted for more than half of the 107 investigations we carried out into cases where there had been serious failings in the handling of a customer's complaint by a retailer<sup>4</sup>. Our CEO and Chair met with the retailer in March 2020 to discuss our continuing concerns over its performance. We made clear we expected it to show significant and rapid improvement in the coming months. Water Plus acknowledged the issues and committed to work with us to implement a package of complaint handling improvements for their customers.

We also met with Clear Business Water in February 2020 to voice our concerns over its poor performance. The retailer responded by putting an action plan in place to reduce complaints below market average.

CCW will monitor its performance closely in 2020-21 along with that of Castle Water, which continued to cause us concern. Castle Water was frequently criticised by us throughout the year for its inconsistent performance and failure to establish a long-term trend of improvement. It took on board the raft of complaint issues we highlighted to it and committed to put measures in place to address them. Its merger with the better performing Affinity for Business on 1 April 2020 also gives the new company an opportunity to share learning and significantly improve its service to customers.

<sup>3</sup> Based on findings of Testing the Waters 2019 research with business customers

<sup>4</sup> There were a total of 107 investigations into retailer complaints – 105 of these were brought to us by non-household customers with the others relating to domestic properties.



## In Wales

**Only those business customers in Wales using more than 50 megalitres of water a year are allowed to choose their retail water supplier. However, we continued to monitor the complaints performance of the companies in Wales to ensure business customers were receiving good levels of service.**

Our non-household complaints report – published in July 2019 – revealed that both Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy performed well with complaint levels below the industry average.







## Consumer Priority: Right first time

### Putting customers at the heart of the market

Alongside our direct work with retailers, we also collaborated closely with the market operator MOSL to improve the consumer landscape.

We have called on MOSL<sup>5</sup> to put out more market intelligence around trading parties who are not meeting performance requirements, such as reading meters in a timely manner. We're committed to ensuring market data – based on the intelligence of both CCW and MOSL – is more transparent and accessible moving forward.

In October 2019, CCW became the customer representative with voting rights on MOSL's Market Codes Panel.

This enables us to vote on code change proposals and ensure that the best interests of customers are represented. Moving forward we'll be using our membership to make sure that changes to the market codes are focused on resolving the issues that cause the most detriment to customers.

We also continued to work with the Retailer, Wholesaler Group (RWG) in an effort to target those areas causing the biggest difficulties for customers<sup>6</sup>.

These include communication problems between retailers and wholesalers and inconsistencies in how trading parties deal with customer requests – such as leakage allowance applications.

Our team helped to shape the content of best practice guides designed to benefit customers and trading parties.

We will continue to use our presence on the group to assist with other ways of trying to improve the service levels and experience for customers.

<sup>5</sup> MOSL is responsible for overseeing the running of England's non-household retail water market.

<sup>6</sup> The Retailer Wholesaler Group (RWG) is made up of retailers and wholesalers with input from other parties including CCW, MOSL and Ofwat. Its aim is to tackle the biggest issues affecting the retail water market and make changes/ share good practice to improve levels of customer service.

October  
2019

achieved voting  
rights on  
MOSL's Market  
Codes Panel





## Consumer Priority: **Right first time**

### Helping small businesses weather the COVID-19 storm

As we moved towards the end of the financial year many small businesses found themselves swept up in the storm of difficulties caused by the outbreak of COVID-19.

The impact on businesses varied enormously, with some having to scale back their operations, while others had to temporarily close. We moved quickly to work with Government, MOSL and Ofwat to ensure the water sector became a source of support during the disruption and uncertainty.

A raft of regulatory changes were quickly introduced to ease the pressure on retailers and free up support for business customers that needed financial relief.

These measures included allowing business customers that had to temporarily close to be exempt from paying water charges.

We also pressed retailers to offer payment breaks to customers struggling to afford their bills and suspend the threat of disconnection during lockdown.

The road to recovery is likely to be a long one for many businesses as they emerge from the health crisis and CCW has plans in place to support customers through the difficult months that lie ahead.

These include publishing guidance for customers on their rights and what they can expect in terms of charges when they reopen their doors.

Called on  
retailers to offer  
**payment  
breaks**  
to business  
customers hit by  
COVID-19







## Consumer Priority: Right first time

### Four water companies come under fire for complaints

It wasn't just water retailers that faced fierce criticism and increased scrutiny from us for their poor performance on complaints during the year.

The publication of **our annual 2018-19 water industry complaints report** in September 2019 exposed significant concerns over the performance of four water companies serving households in England.

Extensive coverage of our report in the media allowed us to increase the pressure on these companies to address the root causes of the complaint rises.

Our regional chairs also requested quarterly updates from the four - **Northumbrian Water, Essex and Suffolk Water, Hafren Dyfrdwy and Thames Water** – setting out what actions they were taking to reduce written complaints and calls from customers to resolve these issues. The majority of these companies were on course to improve their performance in 2019-20 and their progress will be highlighted in our next annual report in September 2020.

**NORTHUMBRIAN  
WATER** *living water*

**ESSEX & SUFFOLK  
WATER** *living water*



severn dee



### In Wales

We warned Hafren Dyfrdwy it must show a significant improvement after it was named as one of the four worst performers for household complaints in our September 2019 report. The company reported a 154 per cent rise in written complaints, as well as a spike in calls from customers to resolve service problems. Many of the problems stemmed from a rise in disruption to water supplies and issues with bills as Dee Valley Water made the transition to Hafren Dyfrdwy.

Hafren was asked to provide quarterly updates to CCW setting out what steps it had taken and the progress it had made in reducing complaints. By the end of 2019-20 the company was on course for an improvement but remained one of the industry's poorest performers.

CCW will set out the progress it has made and what further action needs to be taken when it publishes its next annual report in September 2020.



## Consumer Priority: Right first time

### Overall complaints to CCW fall but problems remain

Most of the time customers are able to resolve any problems they encounter with their water and sewerage services directly with their supplier. However when a customer has exhausted their water company's complaints procedure they can turn to us to try and help find a resolution.

Fewer customers felt the need to do this in 2019-20 with CCW seeing a 9 per cent overall fall in complaints.

The usual steep rise in complaints we experience when customers receive their new bills between February and April did not scale the same heights. This may be partly attributed to the impact of COVID-19 and companies stepping up their communication with customers during the early stages of the pandemic.

More generally, fewer customers contacted CCW as the COVID-19 health crisis took hold during March. At the start of the final three months of the year we had received 4 per cent fewer complaints but by the end of the period it had fallen by 9 per cent.

Despite the fall in contacts our workload remained undiminished due to a steep rise in the number of investigations we had to carry out into the most serious cases of poor complaint handling by water companies and retailers.

More than 140 of the complaints we dealt with had to be escalated to an investigation – marking a 118 per cent increase on the previous year. The vast majority of these investigations related to retailers.

### Contacts to CCW from customers

	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17
Enquiries	2,022	2,019 <sup>7</sup>	9,165	10,699
Complaints	10,256	11,254	9,650	8,715
Formal Investigations	142	65	29	7

<sup>7</sup> There was a marked drop in enquiries in 2018-19 due to a change in our telephone reporting capabilities. We no longer recorded transactional enquiries – for example, someone calling us to ask for their water company contact details.

**9% fall**

in customer  
complaints  
during 2019-2020

During 2019-20  
we carried out

**142**

formal  
investigations



# Consumer Priority: Right first time

## Targeted improvements

Our performance against the targets we set ourselves at the start of the year are set out below. The table shows that we exceeded or met our 5-day complaint acknowledgement and 20 and 40-day case closure targets. This marks a welcome turnaround from 2018-19 when we fell short of our targets for closing cases in 20 and 40 working days.

Improvements to our reporting and resource forecasting allowed us to put in place more robust plans to help us manage high levels of contact.

We were also able to deploy additional resource at short notice to enhance our complaint handling and telephone support for customers.

We built on these improvements by enhancing how our systems work together, lowering administration time so issues raised by customers reach the appropriate caseworker sooner.

Changes to our complaint and enquiry web form also opened up wider channels of communication, making it easier for customers to send us information online.

## Percentage of complaints

	2019-20		2018-19		2017-18		2016-17	
	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
Acknowledged in 5 working days	99.5%	<b>99.9%</b>	99.5%	<b>99.7%</b>	99.7%	<b>99.7%</b>	99.5%	<b>99.6%</b>
Closed in 20 working days	80%	<b>80%</b>	80%	<b>76.4%</b>	80%	<b>80%</b>	80%	<b>80.4%</b>
Closed in 40 working days	91%	<b>91.8%</b>	91%	<b>88.7%</b>	91%	<b>92.4%</b>	91%	<b>92.1%</b>



## Reimbursed charges for leakage

When Ms M received her first water bill after moving house, it was more than double her usual direct debit amount. Her water company told her there could be an internal leak so she called a plumber. After four separate visits, Ms M's plumber discovered that the leak was outside her home, on the water company's pipework.

CCW stepped in and asked the company to pay Ms M compensation for its service failings and to reimburse her for the costs of hiring a plumber. The company also agreed to backdate Ms M's bills to the date she moved in.



I just wanted to get in contact to say we have finally got somewhere with our water company, thanks to you guys getting involved! I really appreciate your help.

Ms M



## Consumer Priority: Right first time

### Targeted improvements

During the year we surveyed up to 100 customers a month to find out how satisfied they were with all aspects of our service.

We exceeded our target for customer satisfaction with courtesy but fell short of our expectations on overall satisfaction with service, complaint outcome and speed. Although we improved on 2018-19, the results remained a disappointment. We have and will continue to put measures in place to get us back on track.

Work on improving satisfaction across the board began in 2018-19 with better forecasting abilities and more resources that allowed us to swiftly adapt to meet spikes in demand.

We saw the green shoots of improvement in the latter part of the year and that continued into 2019-20. Further improvements were rolled out last year including making our service easier to access for customers through tools such as our web form.

We also carried out research into our customers' needs and expectations in differing circumstances. These findings will shape the way we adapt our services to reflect what customers want from us. We're confident these will lead to improvements in our satisfaction levels in 2020-21.

### Customer satisfaction with all aspects of CCW's complaint handling

	2019-20		2018-19		2017-18		2016-17	
	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
Service	75%	<b>72.6%</b>	75%	<b>67.9%</b>	75%	<b>73.3%</b>	72%	<b>75.9%</b>
Outcome of the complaint	61%	<b>57.9%</b>	61%	<b>54.7%</b>	61%	<b>63.5%</b>	61%	<b>62.5%</b>
Speed	80%	<b>73.7%</b>	80%	<b>66.4%</b>	80%	<b>69.1%</b>	80%	<b>77.2%</b>
Courtesy	93%	<b>94.8%</b>	93%	<b>93.7%</b>	93%	<b>93.5%</b>	93%	<b>93.6%</b>







## Consumer Priority: Right first time

### Retailer failures fuel rise in investigations

Water companies and water retailers usually accept our recommendations once we get involved in a customer's case and the issue can often be resolved at that stage. Sometimes though we have to step up our involvement into cases where there is evidence of poor complaint handling.

These formal investigations represent the most serious cases of failure on behalf of the water company or retailer.

During 2019-20 we carried out 142 formal investigations – more than double the previous year. A small number of poor performing water retailers that serve non-household customers were largely responsible for this increase.

This remains a legacy of the difficulties that have hampered the non-household retail water market in England since it opened in April 2017.

Water Plus accounted for 57 of the investigations with Wave, Castle Water and SES Business Water also seeing substantial increases compared to 2018-19.

Our investigations led to 67 customers receiving financial redress, with a further 15 cases resulting in companies having to take some other form of action.

Overall we helped to secure nearly £1.5 million in financial redress for customers – taking our total since 2005 beyond £31 million for households and businesses that have been let down by their water company.

We  
secured  
**£1.5million**  
in financial  
redress



### In Wales

We helped to return more than £17,000 in financial redress to customers of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy, as we supported them with complaints against the two companies.





## Consumer Priority: **Safe and reliable water and wastewater services**

Press companies for safe, reliable water and wastewater services that all consumers can trust now and in the long term.





## Consumer Priority: **Safe and reliable water and wastewater services**

### Headline achievements:



**Campaigned to raise awareness among consumers** of the pressures on our water resources and the vital role people can play in saving water



**Exposed the poor performance of some water companies in reducing leakage** and highlighted the impact that this has on consumers' perceptions of the industry



Supported industry efforts to **provide clearer guidance and labelling for consumers** on what items are safe to flush down the loo





# Consumer Priority: Safe and reliable water and wastewater services

## Keeping our taps flowing into the future

The COVID-19 outbreak provided a stark reminder of how important access to clean water is when it comes to protecting our health through regular handwashing, general hygiene, as well as staying hydrated.

However, the combined impact of population growth and our increasingly volatile climate is making it harder to ensure there is enough water to go round without causing harm to the rivers, streams and wider environment that depend on it too.

Doing nothing is not an option given that if no action was taken by 2050, an extra 3.4 billion litres of water per day would be needed to plug the gap in our public water supply. Balancing the needs of our society and environment is becoming more challenging with every passing year but with greater collaboration we can turn the tide.

That is why we were delighted to be involved in the development of the **National Water Resources Framework for England**. It sets out the UK Government's and regulators' expectations of water companies to work together with other water users to develop regional plans that will collectively meet the national need for water in the future. This may potentially include development of new, large scale, strategic projects – including building new reservoirs and transferring water between regions – as well as new water sources like desalination and recycling. Alongside these developments there will still need to be a significant reduction in leakage and continued campaigning to encourage people to adopt more water efficient behaviours to help curb their personal consumption.

We joined forces with industry stakeholders, including water companies, academics and environmental organisations to help shape and support the launch of the **Love Water** campaign in England. The campaign has been spearheaded by the Environment Agency and Water UK with the aim of helping people understand the value of every drop of water they use. In the run up to the campaign launch in summer 2019, we played a key role in developing and refining some of the consumer-focused messages on saving water. Our research and insight also helped to influence the campaign's tone and focus. That involvement will continue in 2020-21 when we hope to see the campaign have greater visibility.

Throughout the year, we also produced a stream of social media content and blogs helping consumers to understand the significance of their small actions within the bigger picture of protecting the future of our water resources. We offered practical advice on how to save water, highlighting the link between water and energy and the potential financial savings that could flow from this. As mentioned in the Value for Money section, our water meter calculator continued to provide an invaluable tool in helping consumers understand whether they might be better off switching to a water meter.

**The calculator was used more than 256,000 times during the year and helped consumers identify potential annual bill savings totalling nearly £15.6 million.**



## In Wales

We contributed to both Wales Water Forum events held by the Welsh Government in 2019-20.

Matters discussed included the extreme weather events of 2018, climate change adaptation, the Welsh Government's national flood strategy and the role of the new National Infrastructure Commission for Wales.

The impact of periods of extreme weather in Wales continued to highlight the vital importance of building a more resilient water and sewerage network. We worked with water companies during the severe flooding in February 2020 to make sure they communicated effectively with customers whose water supply was disrupted. We also started to work with the National Infrastructure Commission in Wales to identify water resources and supply issues to feed into its call for evidence.

Elsewhere, we assisted both water companies in Wales and other stakeholders to help promote appropriate messages to consumers on water saving. We succeeded in getting Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to acknowledge the importance of raising awareness of the metering option in Wales. We also raised the importance of reviewing a Wales water efficiency action plan as part of the Water Strategy for Wales review, while continuing to support the work of the Water Efficiency Roundtable in Wales.



## Consumer Priority: Safe and reliable water and wastewater services

Industry on  
course for a

**7%**  
reduction in  
leakage

### Demanding more urgency on leakage

Over the past decade, we've repeatedly called on the industry to show greater urgency and ambition in tackling leakage across the water network. Consumers expect water companies to be leading by example when it comes to using water wisely but the past eight years has been characterised by complacency.

That risks dampening people's own motivation to save water if they have the perception their water company is not pulling its weight.

The publication of our annual water resilience report - **Water, Water Everywhere** – in September 2019 revealed that the amount of water lost through leaky pipes had fallen in 2018-19 for the first time since 2015-16. However, this was a marginal decrease of 0.2% compared to the previous year and three companies – Thames Water, Hafren Dyfrdwy and Affinity Water – failed their regulatory leakage targets. The report raised serious questions over whether some companies would be able to rise to the challenge of meeting the much more

demanding targets set out by the regulator for the next five years. We also repeated our warning that consumers would be less motivated to use water wisely if there was a perception water companies were not doing enough to reduce wastage.

As we approached the end of 2019-20, there were signs that the message was finally sinking in with the industry on course for a 7 per cent reduction in leakage. Companies' progress will be highlighted in our annual resilience report in the autumn of 2020.



### In Wales

Hafren Dyfrdwy faced public criticism from us during the summer and autumn of 2019 after we reported that it was one of three water companies to fail its regulatory leakage targets in 2018-19.

We called on the company to urgently address its leakage performance and there were signs it had responded to our challenge in 2019-20.

The company was on course to improve its overall leakage levels but it remained among the poorest performers in the industry. As well as additional investment, we want to see the company embrace more innovative approaches to accelerate improvements.







## Consumer Priority: **Safe and reliable water and wastewater services**

### **Protecting the most vulnerable from disruption**

When a household is suddenly left without a water supply it can cause them enormous inconvenience, particularly if there has been no prior notice of the disruption. Day-to-day tasks can become extremely difficult and increase the sense of isolation among consumers in vulnerable circumstances.

Minimising disruption should be a priority for every water company but our resilience report exposed the lack of progress made by the industry. It also cast doubt over whether water companies were in a stronger position to deal with a repeat of the severe cold weather and rapid thaw that left tens of thousands of customers without water in March 2018.

Our resilience report showed that the amount of time people suffered disruption to their water supply had increased by a fifth since 2016-17. Companies must plan for more severe weather events which are becoming

increasingly common due to climate change. It is essential they have plans in place to avoid failures, mitigate the effects and recover quickly from disruptive weather conditions.

While interruptions to supply still occur, we will continue to push the industry to keep this to a minimum and publicly call out companies that don't hit the standards of service that we expect. We'll also work with companies to make sure they provide appropriate support and information to customers, particularly those who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances.



### **Switched in error**

Mr D contacted CCW after receiving two separate bills when his water company had mistakenly switched him from a domestic to a business account, but maintained that he was still liable for both bills.

CCW told the company to provide clear evidence of the payments Mr D had made, and which account/s these had been credited to. We also insisted that Mr D should be given a goodwill gesture for the confusion and time it had taken to rectify the company's mistakes.

Following our investigation, the company provided all the evidence we had requested for Mr D. They also cancelled the payment request for the closed account, meaning Mr D was in credit and all payments were up to date.



**Finally everything has been sorted out and that should be the end of the matter. I just wanted to say thanks for your help.**

**Mr D**





# Consumer Priority: **Safe and reliable water and wastewater services**

## Ending the misery caused by sewer flooding

Few service failures have the potential to cause more distress for consumers or damage to the environment than sewer flooding. Helping household and business customers resolve their complaints against water companies as they deal with the miserable aftermath of incidents has only strengthened our resolve to consign the issue to history.

Our campaigning and work with companies has been instrumental in bringing about a significant reduction in sewer flooding incidents. Over the past five years the number of properties flooded with sewage has fallen by a quarter, while external flooding incidents are down by almost 40 per cent during the same period.

None of the good progress we have witnessed would have been possible without collaboration across the industry – particularly the work of the Water UK-led 21st Century Drainage Programme Board. CCW was a member of the Board, which also included all 12 sewerage companies, as well as representatives from governments, regulators and environmental groups.

Huge strides were taken by the group in setting out how the UK's drainage systems

would overcome the pressures posed by climate change and population growth over the next 50 years. It came as a huge disappointment to us when the Board was disbanded in 2019.

The conclusion of the Price Review in December 2019 set out a fresh wave of commitments and investment over the next five years aimed at reducing sewer flooding incidents even further, while strengthening infrastructure. Commitments to expand the use of sustainable drainage systems and embrace more innovative solutions – like smart sewer schemes – met with our approval.

However, we want to see the industry show a more consistent level of ambition to eradicate sewer flooding and the misery it causes the families and communities it affects.

Flooding incidents  
down by  
**40%**  
over the last  
5 years





## Consumer Priority: **Safe and reliable water and wastewater services**

### Finding a clear way forward on sewer blockages

We continued to help lead efforts to reduce the number of blockages and flooding incidents caused by inappropriate items being flushed down the sink, toilet and drain. These have far-reaching consequences for consumers and the environment. Sewerage companies collectively spend about £100 million a year clearing clogged up pipes which is paid for through customers' bills. Far worse though is the personal distress and cost of witnessing your home and possessions swimming in foul sewage.

During the year we attempted to unite the industry – as well as environmental and customer groups – behind efforts to create a national campaign to help consumers understand how they can play their part in protecting our sewers from misuse. Little progress was made at a national level but that did not deter us from supporting some companies with their own regional campaigns.

We remained outspoken on the issue of product labelling and making sure consumers were not being misled over what items were safe to flush down the toilet. In October 2019, we publicly supported a landmark ruling by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) which banned an advert for misleading consumers over the

flushability of Andrex Washlets. That paved the way for the manufacturer Kimberly-Clark to sign up to the industry's recognised Fine to Flush standard. Our hope is that more manufacturers will now follow suit so consumers are empowered with a wide choice of affordable products that they can safely flush down the loo without risking a blockage.

In January 2020, Anglian Water and United Utilities rose to our challenge to bring together a broad range of bodies to develop a strategy to reduce sewer misuse and blockages. The Unflushables group has the potential to drive forward significant progress on this issue and we look forward to supporting its work.

Sewerage  
companies  
spend

**£100million**

a year clearing  
clogged pipes







## Consumer Priority: **Informing and engaging all consumers and stakeholders**

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Shape the water sector by informing and engaging all consumers so that consumers' voices are acted upon by decision makers and the industry





## Consumer Priority: **Informing and engaging all consumers and stakeholders**

### Headline achievements:



Provided consumer advice, insight and opinion on a vast array of issues through more than **2,400 individual pieces of coverage in the media**



**Engaged with about 2.6 million people** through our social media channels where we provided advice and support on water and sewerage services



**Met with key political decision makers** including the Environment Secretary to sustain the pressure on the water industry to tackle issues causing detriment to consumers





## Consumer Priority: Informing and engaging all consumers and stakeholders

### A trusted voice in the media

CCW maintained a strong relationship with the media in 2019-20, providing us with a powerful platform to bring about positive change. As the trusted 'go to' source of independent advice, research and insight on issues affecting water consumers, we not only built on our own media coverage, but informed national news stories and political debates from behind the scenes.

During the year, we featured in more than 2,400 individual pieces of coverage, speaking out on issues ranging from water efficiency and tackling leakage to preventing sewer blockages and promoting the availability of financial assistance. These messages had the potential to reach a total combined audience of almost 218 million people.

Our experts provided advice, opinion and insight on TV and radio shows including BBC You and Yours, Rip Off Britain, and BBC Breakfast as well as national newspapers including the Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Express and the Guardian. We also appeared regularly

on local radio stations and in the regional press to explore more local stories and issues impacting consumers.

Our online tools continued to feature regularly on TV and in print media, attracting over 406,000 visitors to our website from consumers needing help with issues relating to their water and sewerage services, looking to cut their bills or access financial support.

Our water meter calculator once again provided a huge hit with households looking to see if they might be better off switching to a meter.

We  
featured in  
more than  
**2,400**  
articles and  
broadcasts

We had a  
combined  
audience of  
**218**  
million  
people

Attracted  
**406,000**  
visitors to our  
website



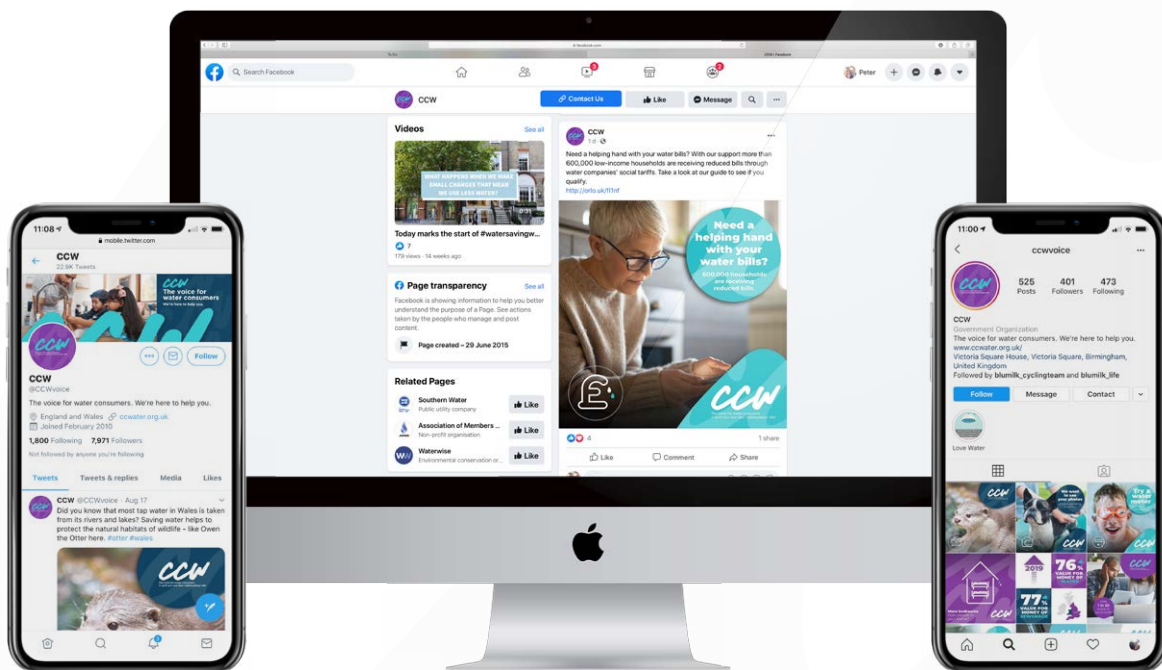
# Consumer Priority: Informing and engaging all consumers and stakeholders

## Channelling the power of social media

**Social media remained a vital part of our strategy to inform and advise consumers, as well as engage with stakeholders within and beyond the sector.**

In 2019-20, about 2.6 million people engaged with our messages across our channels through visiting our pages and liking, sharing or commenting on our content.

Our largest social media footprint remains on Twitter where we attracted more than 700 new followers. Our presence and levels of engagement continue to grow on other platforms too, including Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook.



## Unusually high bill

Ms D contacted CCW after receiving an unusually high bill from her water company.

Her supplier investigated and established that there was no leak on the meter, neither was the meter on a shared supply, leaving two options – the meter was faulty or the customer had increased her water consumption.

CCW arranged for independent testing of the meter, which found no fault. However we argued that it could not be down to Ms D's usage as the increase was too large and did not fall in line with her previous meter readings.

Following our involvement, the water company agreed to grant a one-off allowance of £2,345 as a gesture of goodwill. A new meter was also installed, which gave readings more consistent with Ms D's usage.



I really would like to thank you, it has been such a stressful time and I felt so vulnerable, it is such a relief. Thank you so much for your help.

Mrs D





## Consumer Priority: Informing and engaging all consumers and stakeholders

### Shaping the political debate

**There was an increased political focus on the water industry during 2019-20 as ministers turned their scrutiny to longstanding failures on issues such as leakage and protecting the environment.**

As warm weather in June 2019 brought with it the prospect of hosepipe bans and drought, our CEO, Tony Smith, was invited by the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove, to attend a closed meeting of water company and regulator CEOs on water sector performance in July 2019.

Elsewhere, our ability to engage more regularly with Parliamentarians continued to be limited by EU Exit, a period of purdah ahead of the December 2019 General Election, and the outbreak of coronavirus.

Despite this, we continued to provide them with insight and support on a number of occasions, via Ministerial briefings and research statistics and held several productive one-to-one meetings with MPs, Ministers and Government officials.

We also continued to nurture constructive relationships with key industry stakeholders – including Ofwat, the Drinking Water Inspectorate, company Customer Challenge Groups and the Environment Agency – for the benefit of water consumers.



### In Wales

**We continued to maintain close links with Welsh Assembly Members, some of whom have attended our Wales Committee meetings in public.**

We also met privately with Welsh Government Ministers as well as Natural Resources Wales and the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales, to discuss a range of topics including the 2019 Price Review, the impact of the transition from Dee Valley Water to Hafren Dyfrdwy on customers and the development of new landlord regulations in Wales.

In October 2019 we welcomed a new Wales Chair, Rhodri Williams, who was appointed by the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths AM.



## Consumer Priority: Informing and engaging all consumers and stakeholders

### Building closer links with stakeholders

**The appointment of a new National Chair for CCW in June 2019 provided the impetus for a series of additional stakeholder meetings between Rob Light and key Government officials, stakeholder organisations and water industry leaders.**

In support of our key strategic campaigns, Rob and other senior CCW spokespeople addressed delegates at a number of high-profile conferences and events, including the Westminster Energy conference, Utility Week's Customer and Affordability Conferences, the Water Report's Social Contract Summit and a Parliamentary roundtable event hosted by the New Statesman.



### Resolving unpaid debt

Despite making regular payments and contacting her water company on several occasions to resolve the issue, Ms S was repeatedly contacted by a debt collection agency regarding an unpaid water bill.

CCW stepped in and the company discovered that Ms S had two accounts under her name – one as a result of her housemate moving out and updating the company without her knowledge. As a result, despite keeping up-to-date with payments, her account continued to show it was in debt.

Following CCW's involvement, the company reassessed Ms S's account and credited her with the payments they'd received in error. Additionally, it provided a goodwill gesture of £60 for the inconvenience caused.



**I can't thank you enough for all your help. This has really been such a stressful situation; it is amazing to finally have it all sorted thanks to your intervention.**

**Ms S**



## Consumer Priority: Informing and engaging all consumers and stakeholders



**The voice for water consumers**  
**Y corff sy'n rhoi llais i ddefnyddwyr dŵr**

### **A brand new look**

**Finally, in February 2020, we took the huge step of launching a fresh new look and brand for our organisation.**

Now known as CCW – the voice for water consumers, the change was inspired by consumers and will form a crucial part of our wider efforts to raise awareness of our work championing their interests and ensuring our services are always easy-to-access.

Our rebrand saw us depart from the CCWater name and logo – which had remained largely unchanged since the birth of the organisation back in 2005 – and increase the prominence of the Welsh language in our core identity.



# Our Board – 2019-20



**Rob Light**  
Chair



**Professor Bernard Crump**  
Central And Eastern Chair



**Tony Smith**  
Chief Executive\*



**Rhodri Williams**  
Wales Chair



**Rob Light**  
Acting Northern Chair



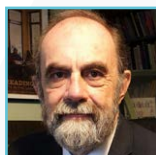
**Julie Hill**  
Independent Member



**Sir Tony Redmond**  
London And South East Chair



**Rob Wilson**  
Independent Member



**David Heath CBE**  
Western Chair



**Alison Austin OBE**  
Independent Member

You can find out more about each of our Board members [here](#)

\*Tony Smith retired at the end of June 2020 and was succeeded by Emma Clancy.

## Local Consumer Advocates - LCAs

We appoint a group of Local Consumer Advocates (LCAs) who work with our teams in the English regions and Wales to champion the interests of customers in their area.

LCAs play a vital role in holding water companies to account over the services they provide to local people, as well as ensuring suppliers take decisions that reflect the views of their customers.

Find out more about our LCAs [here](#)

# ccw

The voice for water consumers

Y corff sy'n rhoi llais i ddefnyddwyr dŵr



[ccwater.org.uk](http://ccwater.org.uk)

## Contact us

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