



Consumer Council for Water

Research to Understand the Customer Complaints Experience with Water Companies



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Authors

Belinda Herbert – Head of Insight

Catherine Wall – Researcher

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Introduction

Background

The Consumer Council for Water (CCW) was set-up in 2005 to represent the interests of consumers. As the independent voice of water consumers, CCW want consumers to receive high standards of service and good value for money.

Each year CCW commissions a range of research with water consumers to better understand their experiences and perceptions. This provides the evidence to represent consumer interests at government and water industry level as well as to ensure consumers understand the service they can expect to receive.

This project focused on the experience of making a complaint to a water company with the core purpose of developing a fuller understanding of the barriers to household customers making or escalating a complaint. The findings will be used to improve the overall complaints process by making it more accessible to household customers.

Research objectives

The overall objective was to better understand the barriers to bill payers making or escalating a complaint within the water industry.

Specific research objectives include:

- Understanding why bill-payers who are dissatisfied don't complain
 - What proportion of bill-payers don't complain?
 - Why don't they complain?
- Understanding the satisfaction of bill payers who complain to their water company
 - What proportion are satisfied with the response?
 - What proportion are dissatisfied with the response but do not escalate their complaint?
 - Reasons for not escalating complaints when dissatisfied
- Identifying the barriers to bill-payers raising and escalating complaints
 - Are barriers with the water companies or CCW?
 - How can these barriers be removed or reduced?
 - Are there any differences between England & Wales?
 - Do the barriers impact any customer group more than others?

These objectives required two separate strands of research which are explained in more detail in the following section.

Methodology

In order to address the stated research objectives ORS undertook two distinct surveys and some supplementary qualitative work.



A representative telephone survey of bill payers

The purpose of this survey was to identify the proportion of bill payers who are dissatisfied with the service from the water company but do not complain.

We undertook an ad-hoc telephone survey of 1,483 bill payers across England and Wales. Quotas were set to ensure a fair distribution by age and location and the final dataset was weighted to reflect the population of bill payers¹. Two hundred interviews were completed in Wales (a boosted sample) to allow for some separate analysis between the two nations.

The telephone number included a randomised selection of landline numbers and additional mobile sample to maximise reach amongst younger and more transient householders where landlines are less commonly used.

The survey lasted an average of six minutes, and a copy of the questionnaire can be seen in the appendix.

An online survey of complainants

In order to understand the experience of making a complaint we needed to talk to those who had made one recently. We therefore worked with a number of water companies, who kindly agreed to participate in the research, and invited recent complainants (past four months) to complete an online survey.

The online survey identified the reason for their initial complaint and then asked about the overall experience and satisfaction with the final outcome.

We sent just over 3,000 email invitations and received 506 responses. Due to the self-selection elements of this online survey we cannot be sure that it is a representative cross-section of responses. Those who were dissatisfied with the outcomes or had the most serious reasons for complaint are more likely to have chosen

¹ This used quotas provided by CCW based on Water Matters data

to participate in this survey. However, the data collected is able to directly inform our understanding of the customer experience.

Complainants were invited to participate via an email containing a personalised link to the survey, which enabled us to monitor responses and send a reminder to non-participants. The survey took an average of seven minutes to complete, and a copy of the questionnaire can be seen in the appendix.

Depth interviews with complainants

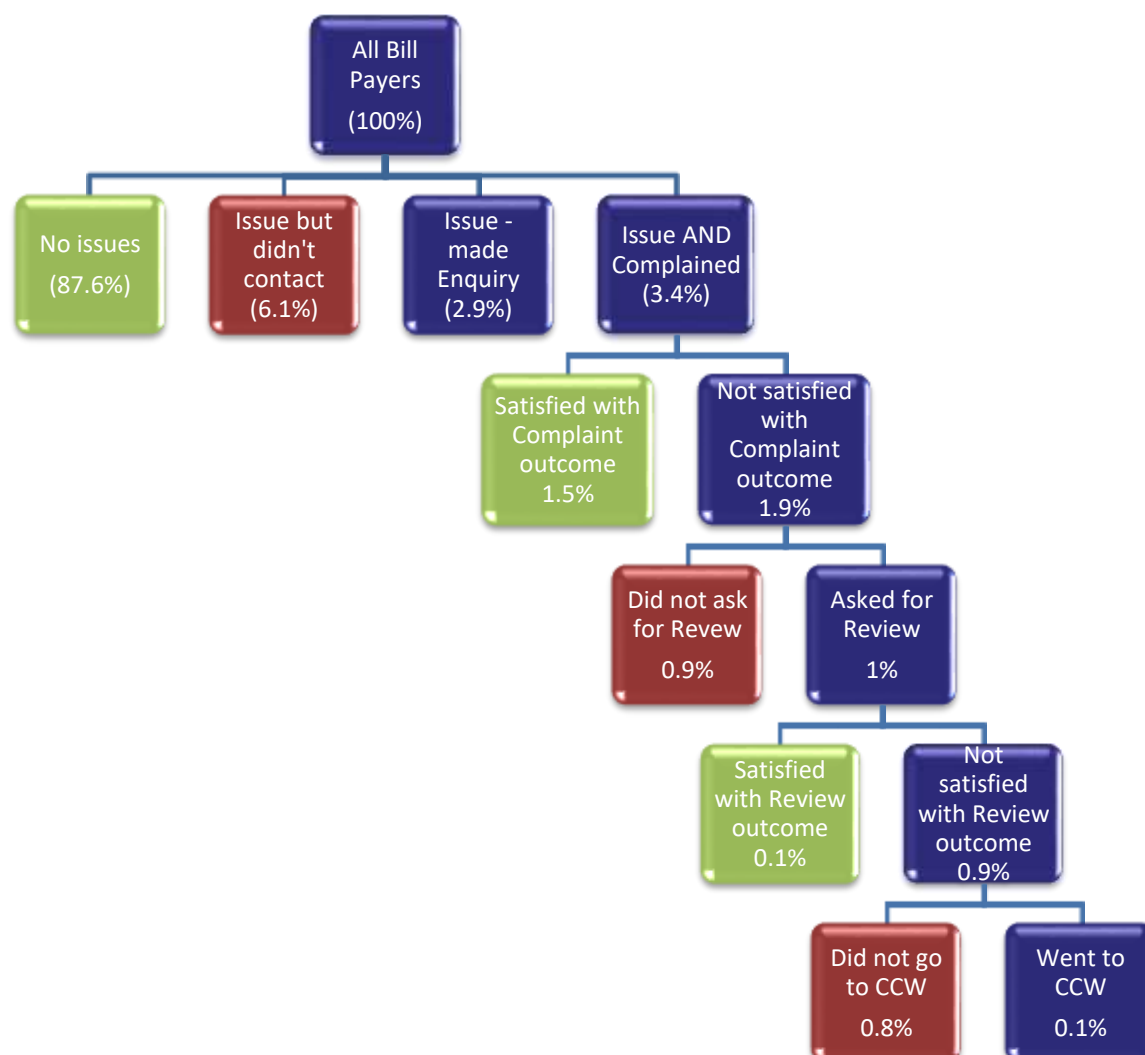
The final stage of the project was a small number of depth interviews with those who had made a complaint. The purpose of this stage was to add a little more detail to our findings. Interviewees were selected from those who had completed the online survey and indicated they were willing to be contacted by our research team.

Interviewees were deliberately selected to represent particular types of experience and provide some real-life examples to support the quantitative data in this report.

Executive Summary

A core objective of this project was to understand the overall level of dissatisfaction and the proportion of bill payers that failed to pursue their complaints.

The diagram below seeks to identify the dissatisfied bill payers who may be hidden from any official complaint records. The red blocks show those who fell out of the complaints process despite not being satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.



This report particularly explores the barriers which may have prevented bill payers from making a complaint.

For a broader context, Ofwat data from 2011² indicates that 23.8 million households receive a household water bill. Applying our research findings to this household estimate we would estimate that:

- 1.5m bill payers have had an issue with their water company but not made contact.
- Over 200,000 bill payers were dissatisfied with their complaint outcome but did not ask for a review.
- Almost 200,000 bill payers were dissatisfied with the review process but did not go to CCW.

²We have used an estimate of 23.8m households receiving water bills based on Ofwat data
<https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/regulated-companies/company-obligations/performance/companies-performance-2011-12/properties-billed-and-metering-rates-2011-12/>

Key findings

Telephone survey

- Most bill payers (88%) don't have a problem with their water or sewerage services so have no reason to complain to their water company.
- Half of those with an issue will NOT make contact – 6% of all bill payers.
- The most common reason for not making contact was a belief that the issue was not serious enough to warrant contact (23%). However, low expectations about resolution was the second most commonly cited reason for not making contact (19%).

Survey of complainants

- The cause of complaints included within this study ranged from administrative errors to major issues with sewage or loss of supply. Almost one in five people (18%) classified their issue as not very serious (rated less than 5 out of 10) but, in contrast, more than three in ten people (32%) rated their problem as extremely serious (rated 10).
- Two in three respondents found the water company complaint process required a moderate to great deal of effort (rated as 5 or more out of 10 on an effort scale).
- Although 44% were happy with the outcome of their complaint, 45% were not.
- Customer service when making the complaint was the top reason for this dissatisfaction, with reasons such as not feeling the company was taking ownership, or having to make multiple contacts before getting an answer cited.
- Nearly half of those who were unhappy did not escalate their case with the water company from stage 1 to stage 2. As well as the barrier of effort, 40% felt nothing would change and 30% said they were unaware of the right to escalate for review.
- Although referenced by a minority (5%), accessibility, in the form of understanding the process and correspondence skills was cited as a barrier to escalation.
- 58% of respondents who escalated their case to review (stage 2) but remained unhappy after exhausting the company process were unaware of their right to escalate to CCW.
- If people were unhappy with the outcome of their initial complaint to their water company, they were likely to stay that way, either because they did not escalate their complaint or because a review (stage 2) complaint did not resolve the matter for them. Only 5% of respondents who escalated their case to review were satisfied with the outcome.

Depth interviews

There were clear themes from respondents about what could be improved to make the complaint process easier and, in their view, fairer:

- Take the complaint seriously from the start and believe the complainant.
- Investigate complaints properly and be proactive in exploring what may have gone wrong.
- Improve communications with the customer during the complaint process – including regular updates where appropriate.
- Provide a more transparent written response with facts and figures that people can understand.

Bill Payer Survey

More than one in eight have been dissatisfied in the past year

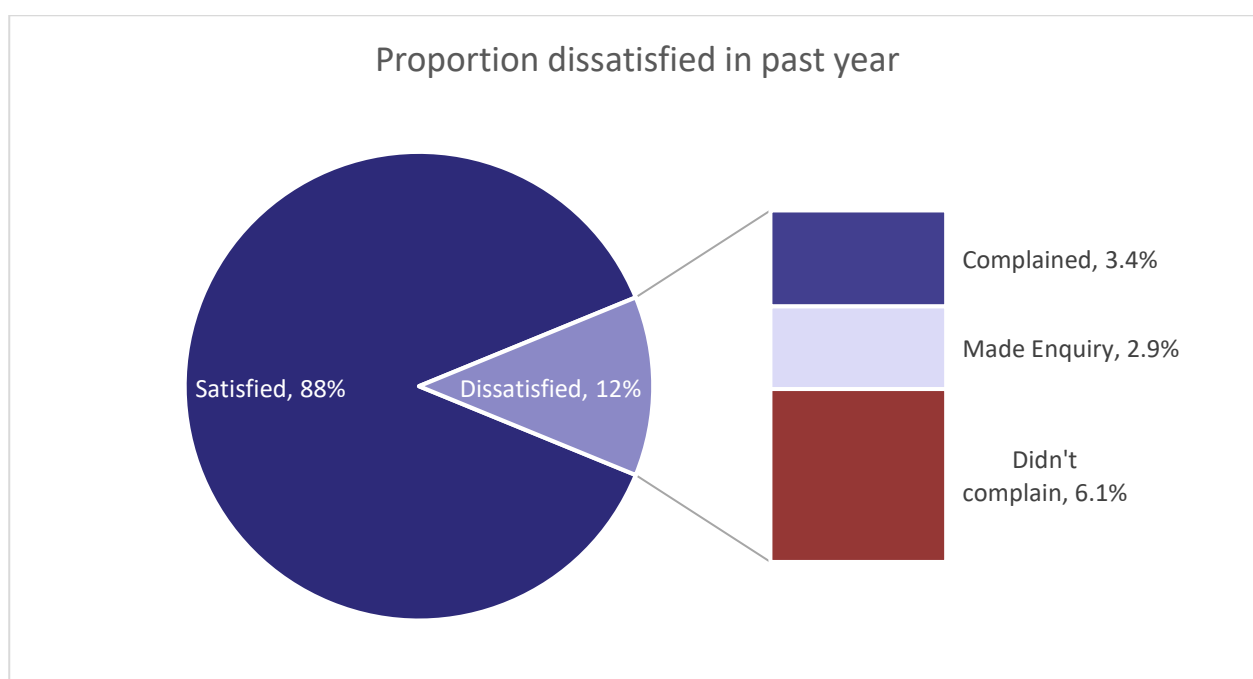
Our survey sought to understand the overall level of dissatisfaction with water and sewerage services amongst bill payers.

Overall, 12% of householders had been dissatisfied with their water company in the past year. The most common concerns were water quality and that their bills were too high, with lost pressure and water leaks also common complaints.

However, only just over half of those who said they were dissatisfied had actually contacted their water company. This suggests a level of hidden dissatisfaction with around 6% of bill payers being unhappy but not raising the issues with their supplier.

Of those that had contacted their water company 3.4% said they had made a complaint and 2.9% had made an enquiry. Amongst those who made an enquiry, a proportion were dissatisfied with the response and plan to progress making a complaint.

Figure 1: Dissatisfaction amongst bill payers during the last 12 months



Base: All respondents (1,483 people)

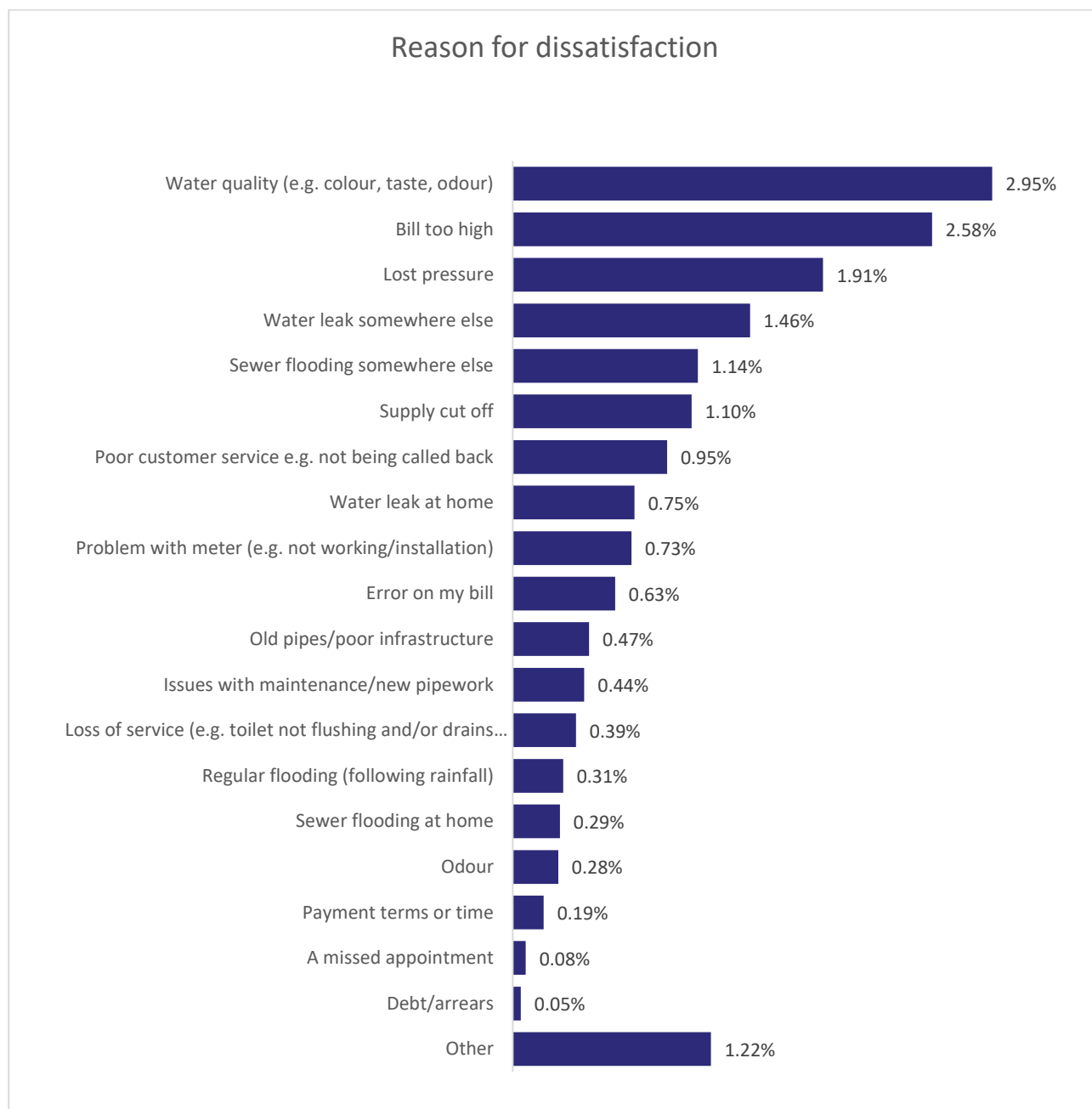
There were some demographic differences in the levels of dissatisfaction and proportions making a complaint:

- Those aged 75+ were significantly less likely to be dissatisfied.
- Those aged 60 - 74 were the most likely age group to have followed up their dissatisfaction with a complaint with 8% having done so.
- Those in Wales are significantly less likely to be dissatisfied and not complain (3% compared with 6% for England).

Key reasons for dissatisfaction

Those who were dissatisfied were asked to explain what caused the dissatisfaction and this is summarised in Figure 2. While the overall percentages for each issue are small, as there are over 23 million households paying a water bill this is still a fairly high number of individuals with a negative experience.

Figure 2: Reasons for bill payers dissatisfaction with their water supply



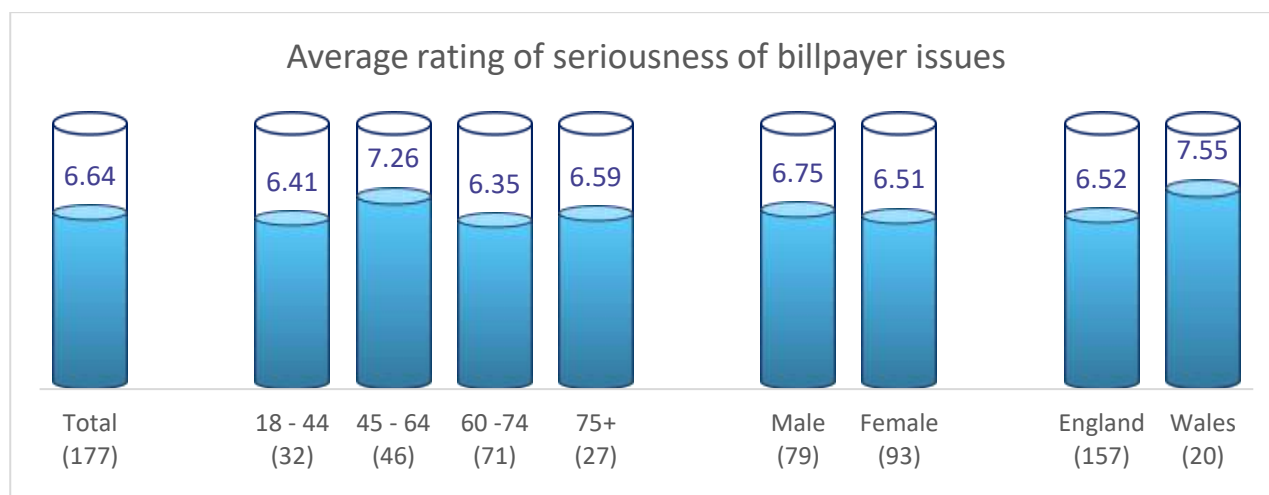
Base: All respondents (1,483 people)

Seriousness of dissatisfaction

The 12% who had been dissatisfied were asked how serious they felt the issue was (using a scale of 0-10, 0 being not at all serious and 10 being extremely serious). Almost one in four (23%) of this group rated the issue they experienced as extremely serious (10 out of 10).

Although there are some apparent differences by sub-groups these are not statistically significant – and with relatively small sub-samples we cannot be sure this is not simply due to random sampling.

Figure 3: Average rating of seriousness of billpayer issues by demographic group



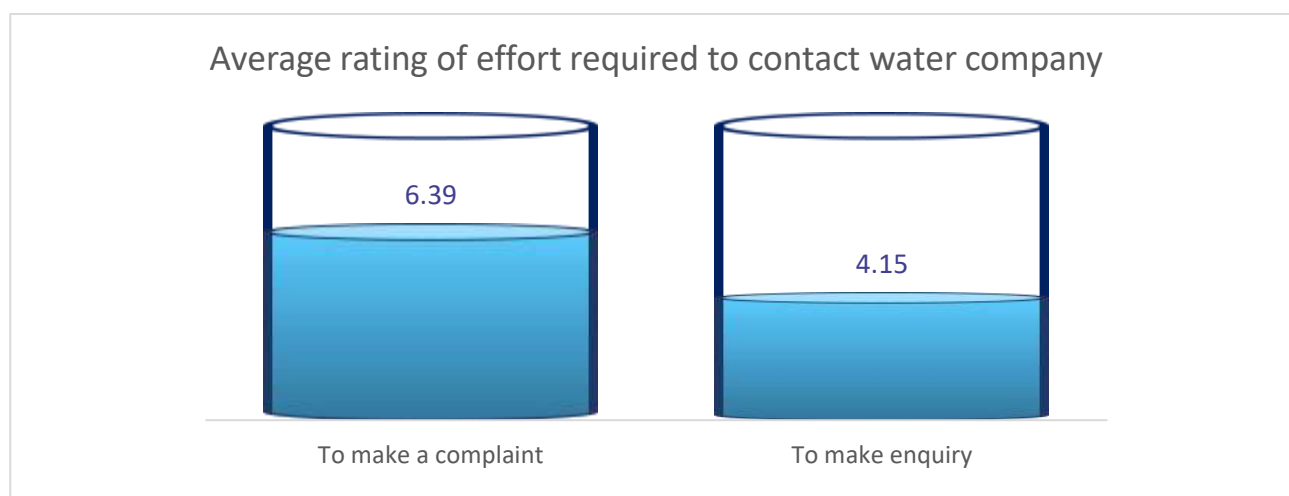
Base: Those who were dissatisfied (177 people)

Effort required to make contact

Those who had made contact with the water company were asked how much effort it had been using a scale of 0 – 10 where 0 was no effort and 10 was a great deal of effort.

The average scores for the amount of effort required is shown in Figure 4 with enquiries being seen as less effort than complaints. However, it should be pointed out that this includes one in five (20%) of those making a complaint saying the process required a great deal of effort (rated 10 out of 10).

Figure 4: Average effort required by bill payers when contacting water company



Base: Those making a complaint (56 people); Those making an enquiry (39 people)

Why do only half of those dissatisfied make contact?

Just over 12% of the bill payers we contacted said that they have been dissatisfied with the service received from the water company during the past year, however only half of those chose to contact the company.

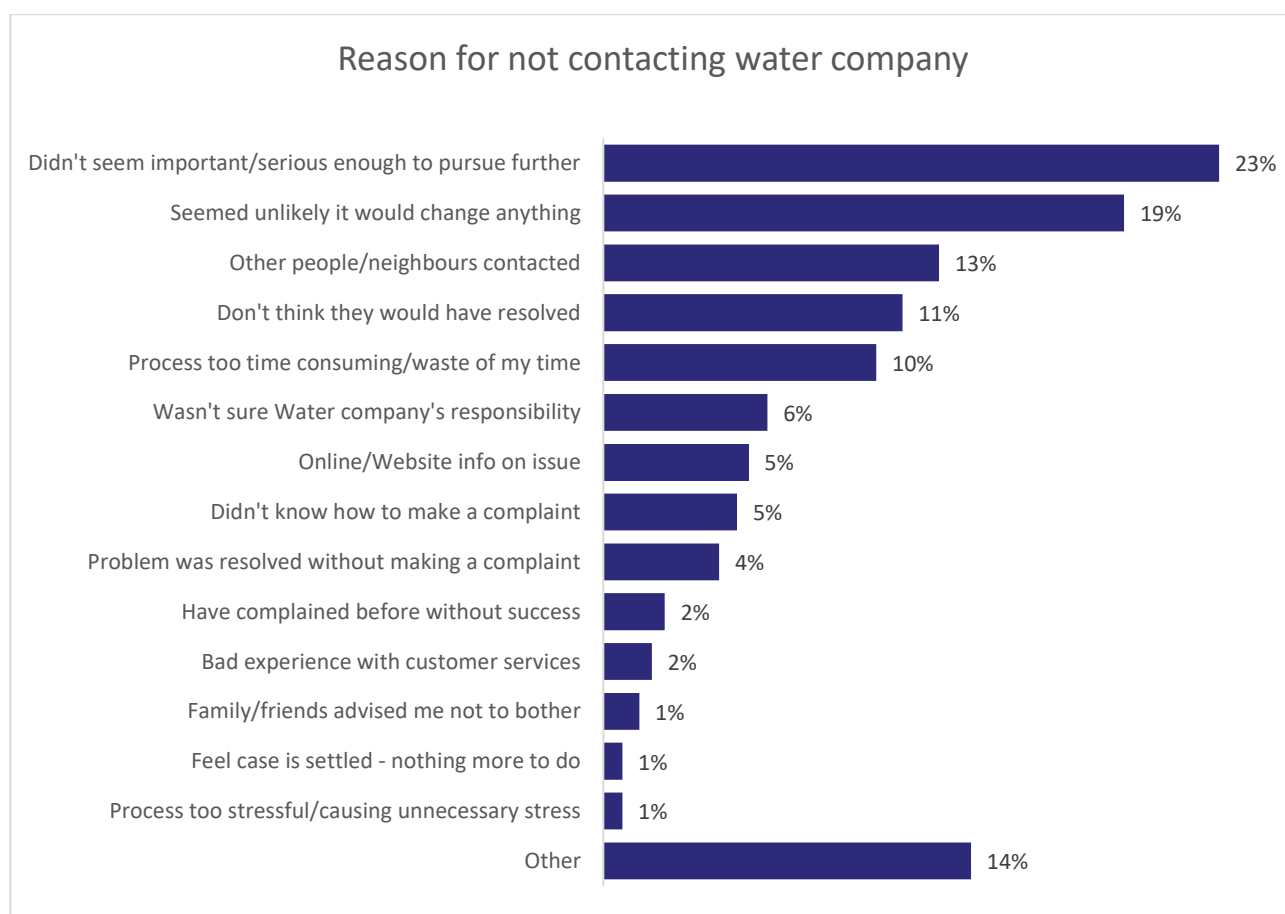
The most common reason given was that the issue didn't seem important or serious enough to pursue (22%). This kind of low level dissatisfaction will clearly colour any general discussion of the industry but cannot easily be addressed by water companies if they have no awareness.

Perhaps a particular concern is the 19% who didn't complain because it seemed unlikely it would change anything. This suggests either a low expectation of the industry or a previous poor experience. Similarly, *'don't think they would have resolved'* (11%), *'have complained before without success'* (2%) and *'bad experience with customer services'* (2%) suggests a certain amount of resignation.

Some of the issues were obviously a result of an issue impacting more than one person in their area and these were addressed by neighbours making contact (12%) or finding information about the issue online (5%).

A potential concern is that 5% of people said that they didn't know how to make a complaint. This is a relatively small proportion and amounts to just four people, and this survey is therefore unable to draw any conclusions about how hard they tried to find out how to complain. This extrapolates to around 0.25% of bill payers being dissatisfied but not knowing how to complain.

Figure 5: Reasons for bill payers not contacting water company



Base: Those dissatisfied but not making contact (81 people)

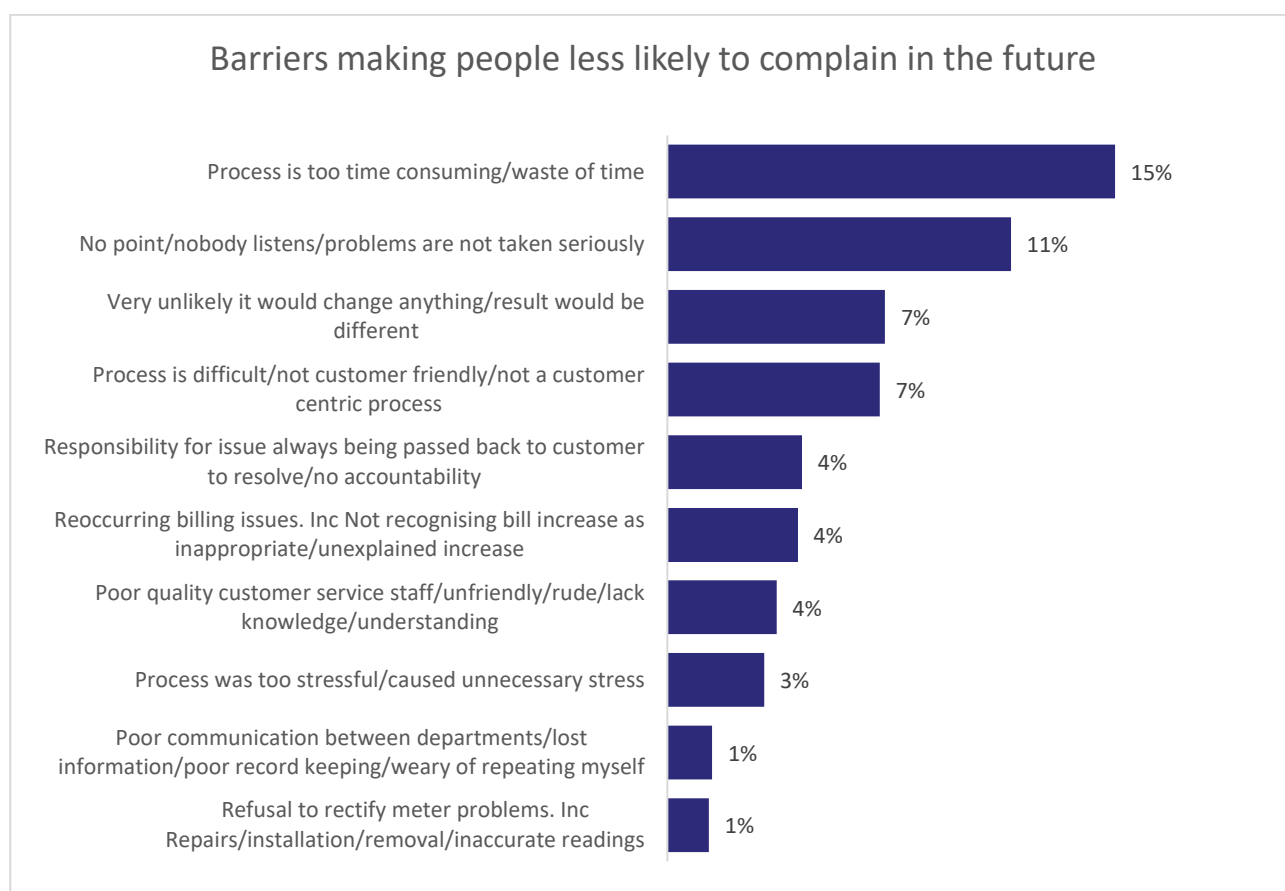
Future behaviour

All those who had expressed dissatisfaction were asked if there was anything that would make them less likely to complain in the future. The intention was to identify any potential barriers that people had experienced.

Almost three in five (58%) said that nothing would make them less likely to complain if they faced a similar problem in the future, which suggests they did not encounter any particular barriers.

The most commonly perceived barriers to future complaints are shown in Figure 6. The key theme here may be a sense that their complaint had changed nothing and had thus not been worth their time.

Figure 6: Any barriers making people less likely to complain in future



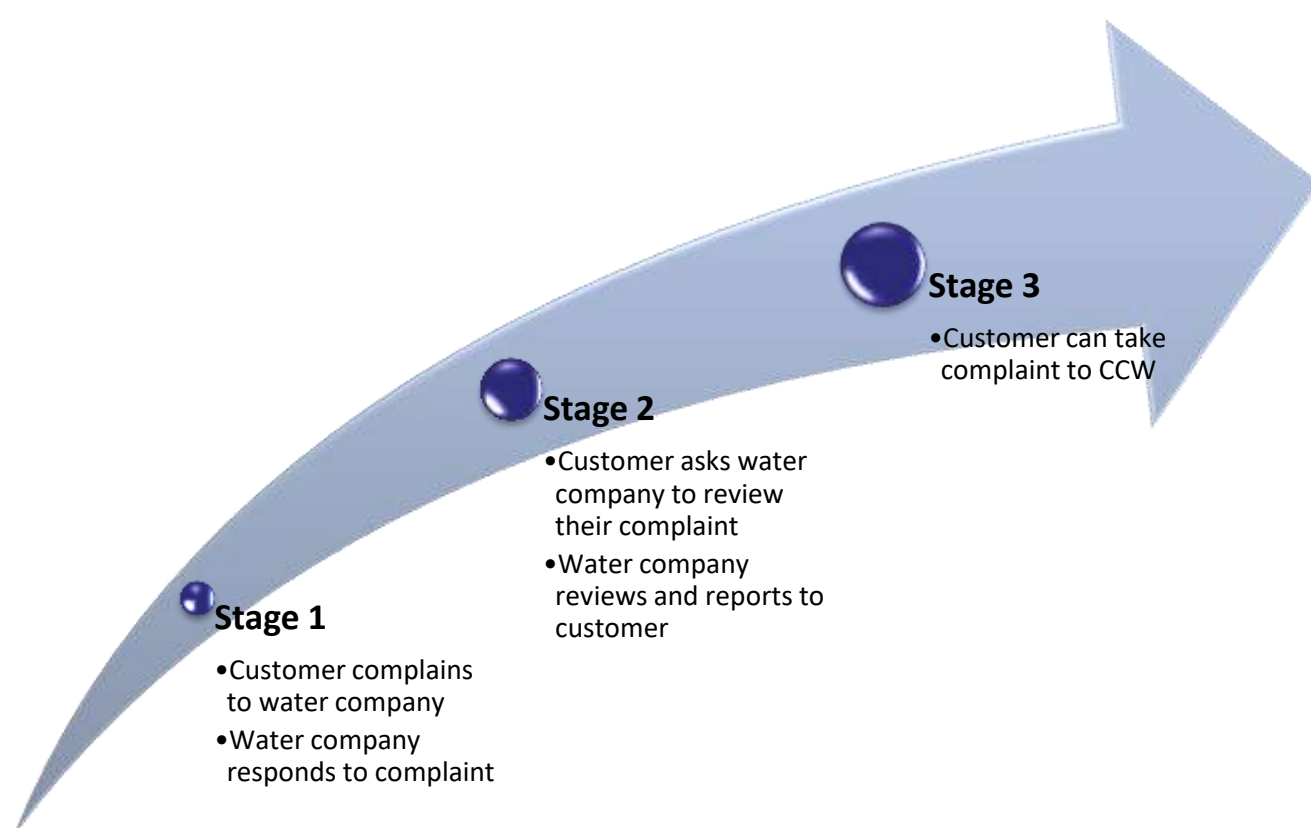
Base: Those who were dissatisfied (158 people)

Complainant Survey

All water companies in England and Wales offer a two stage complaint process.

An initial consumer complaint to the water company is referred to as stage 1. The company considers the response and sends its reply. If a consumer is unhappy with the reply, they can ask for the complaint to be reviewed, this is stage 2 of the process.

Once a company has responded at stage 2, the company process has been exhausted. If the consumer remains unhappy, they can take their complaint to the Consumer Council for Water, CCW, for an independent review.



Making a Complaint - Stage 1

Billing is the most common cause for complaint

Amongst those who had made a complaint, the most frequently cited reason was an issue to do with billing. This included those who felt their bill was simply too high as well as those who had identified specific issues with their bill. Around 12% complained of errors on their bill whilst 15% felt their bill was too high. Much smaller numbers mentioned arrears or difficulties with the payment terms.

Complaints about poor customer service and administrative errors were also fairly high (9% and 7% respectively). The issue of administrative errors potentially overlaps with billing issues and poor service as it sometimes related to the wrong details being assigned to a customer.

Figure 7: Reason for complaint



Base: All those making a complaint (506 people)

Amongst our bill payers telephone survey there was a slightly different focus with a slightly higher proportion of people mentioning water quality than billing issues. However, within this survey we also saw that those with a billing problem had a higher propensity to complain. This would explain why our complainant survey saw billing issues as the most commonly cited complaint.

Seriousness of Issue

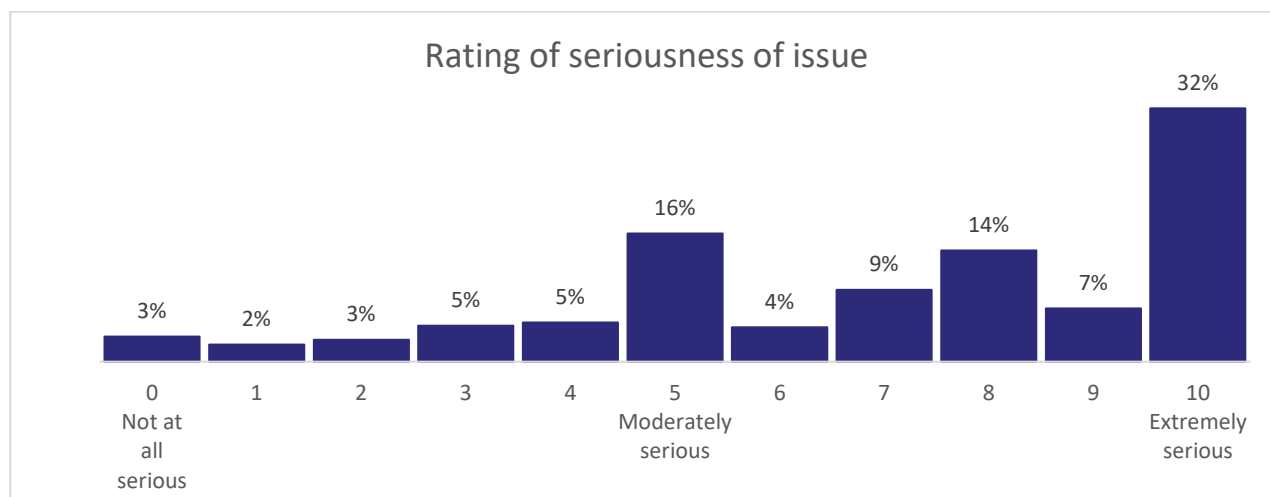
The range of complaints included within this study ranged from administrative errors to major issues with sewage or loss of supply. Complainants were asked to identify on a scale of 0 – 10 how serious they felt their complaint was.

Within our sample there were a number of people who felt their concern was more of a query or feedback than a genuine complaint. The industry's complaint definition is broad and might explain this; water companies record any written contact that expresses or implies dissatisfaction as a complaint so there may

have been a mismatch at times between the way a customer perceives their concern and how it is handled by a water company.

There were almost one in five people (18%), who classified their issue as not very serious (rated between 0 and 4) but, in contrast, more than three in ten people rated their problem as extremely serious (rated 10).

Figure 8: Seriousness of the issue resulting in complaint



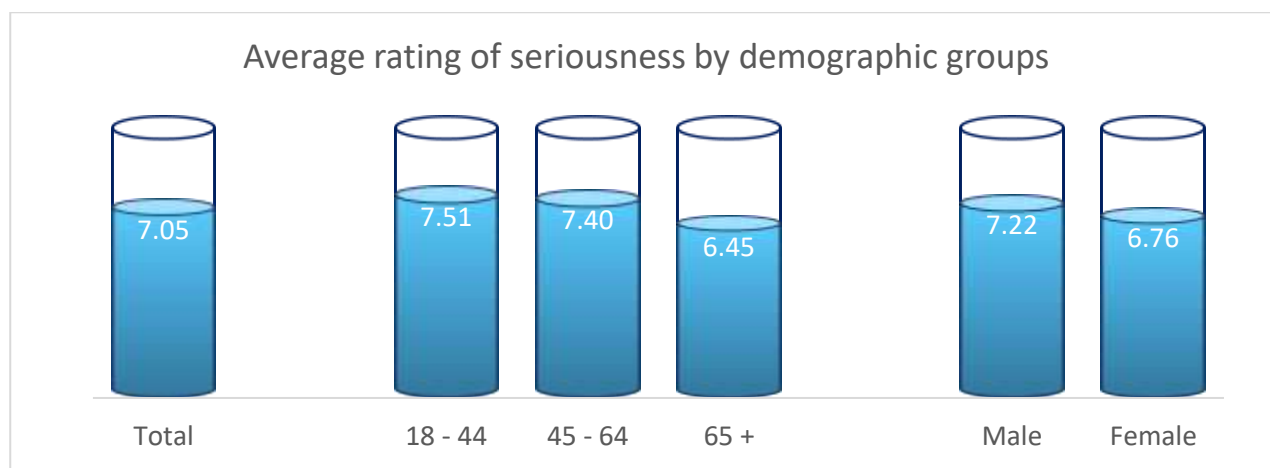
Base: All respondents (506)

Those making complaints about *sewage flooding* or *high bills* were significantly more likely to rate their issue as extremely serious (10 out of 10) with 65% and 45% doing so respectively. Conversely, those making a complaint about poor customer service were more likely to rate this as not very serious, with 30% of them giving a score between 1 and 4.

The average rating of seriousness from the online complainant survey was 7.05. There was some variation in this average by age and gender. Those over 65 gave a slightly lower average rating (6.45) than younger respondents (7.40 and 7.51 respectively). This indicates that older customers are more likely to complain at a lower perceived level of seriousness and a potential reason for this could be that younger customers are more likely to be 'time poor' and thus need an issue to be more serious before they take action.

The average seriousness rating of those who asked for a review following the outcome of their first complaint was higher than for those who didn't pursue their complaint to the second stage (8.53 compared with 6.92). This demonstrates a potential trade-off between the seriousness of the issue and the willingness to escalate.

Figure 9: Average rating of seriousness of complaint by demographic group



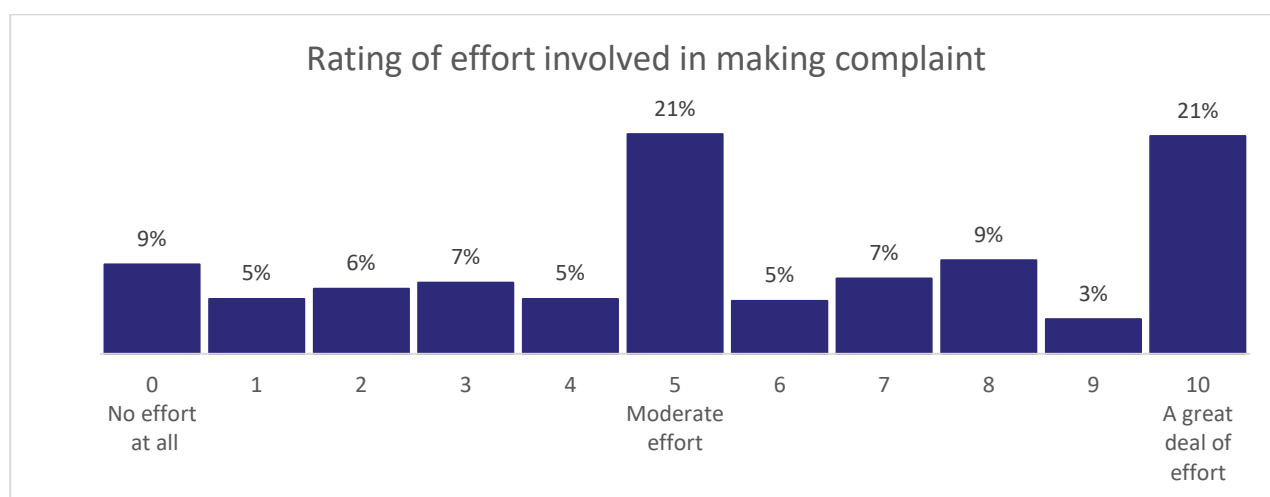
Base: All respondents (506)

Effort required to complain

In order to help with an understanding of the barriers to making a complaint to their water company we asked those who had done so how much effort they felt was required to take this first step.

Over two in ten people (21%) felt that it had taken a great deal of effort to make a complaint, whilst one in ten (9%) felt it had been no effort at all.

Figure 10: Effort involved in making level 1 complaint

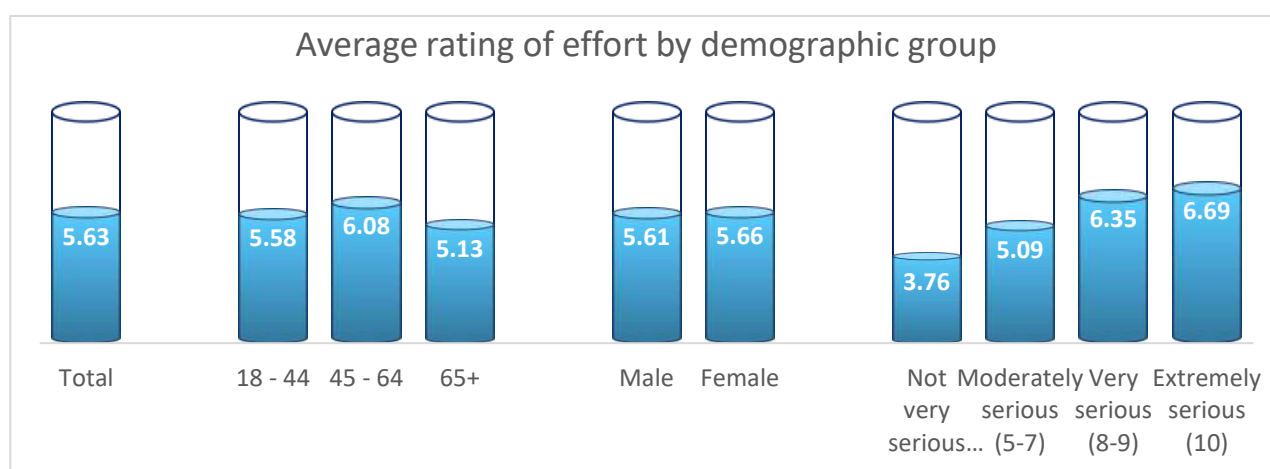


Base: All respondents (506)

Over 65s seem to feel making a complaint is less effort than those aged 45 - 64. This needs to be explored further – is it the amount of time taken? Is it the ability to make a phone call during ‘office hours’? Or do younger people have less tolerance for the systems and expect a more streamlined approach?

There is a clear correlation between how serious a complaint was perceived to be and how much effort it took to make. This needs to be reviewed further and there may be a ‘cause and effect’ barrier where those with less serious issues do not enter the complaints process because it is too much effort whereas the very or extremely serious complaints are pursued because they are felt to better warrant the effort required.

Figure 11: Average effort for level 1 complaint by sub-group



Base: All respondents (506)

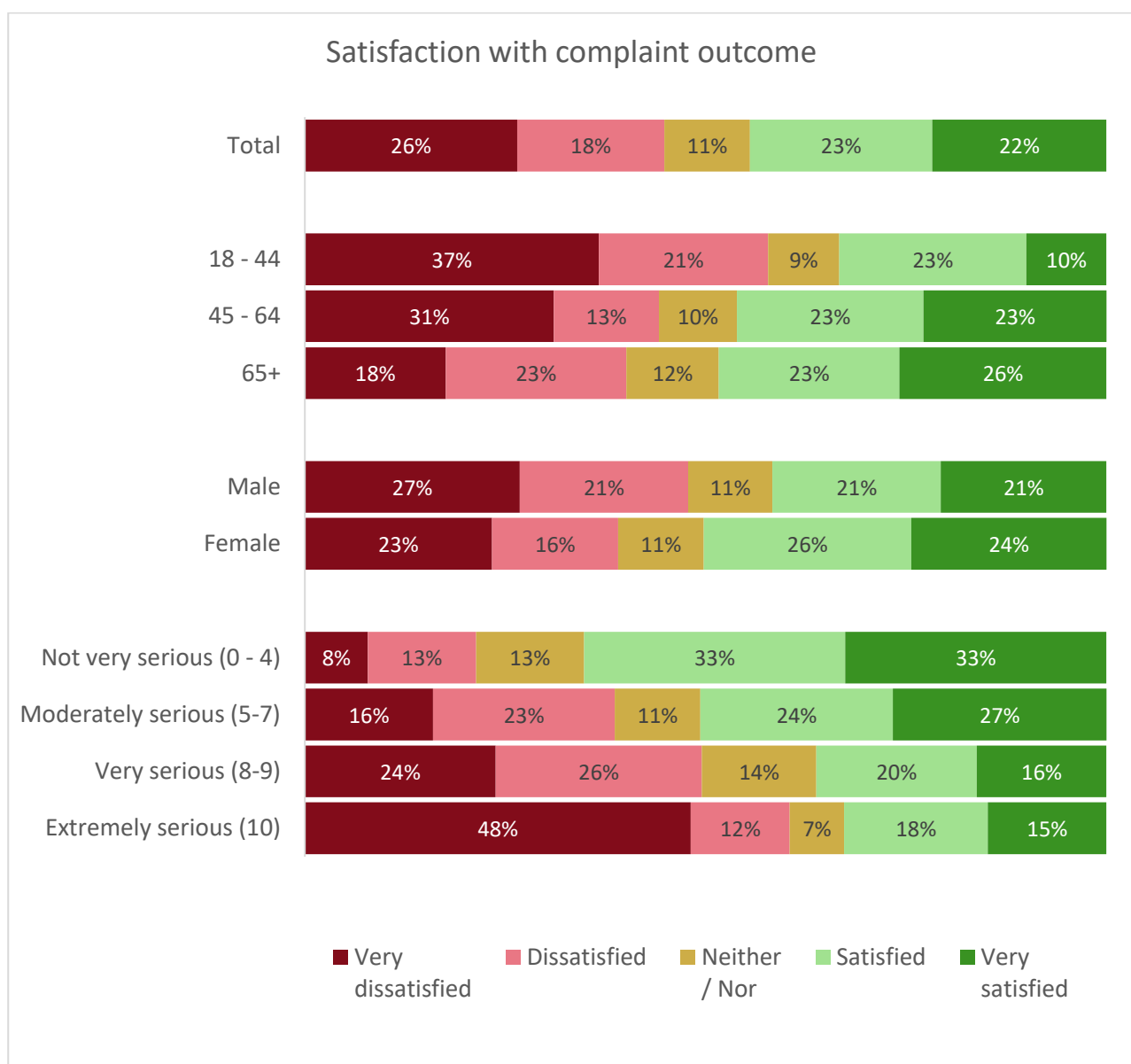
Satisfaction with outcome of complaint

All respondents were asked whether they were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. Overall, there was an even split between the proportion who were satisfied (44%) and those who were dissatisfied (45%).

There is an apparent correlation with age, with the youngest age group the most likely to be dissatisfied (58% compared with 44% and 40% respectively for older people).

There is also a clear correlation with the level of seriousness – those who considered their complaint to be extremely serious are significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. It could be that less serious issues are more quickly and easily resolved, so feel less effort, whereas more complex and serious matters are likely to take more time and information to get to the bottom of, so increasing effort and potentially decreasing satisfaction.

Figure 12: Satisfaction with initial complaint outcome



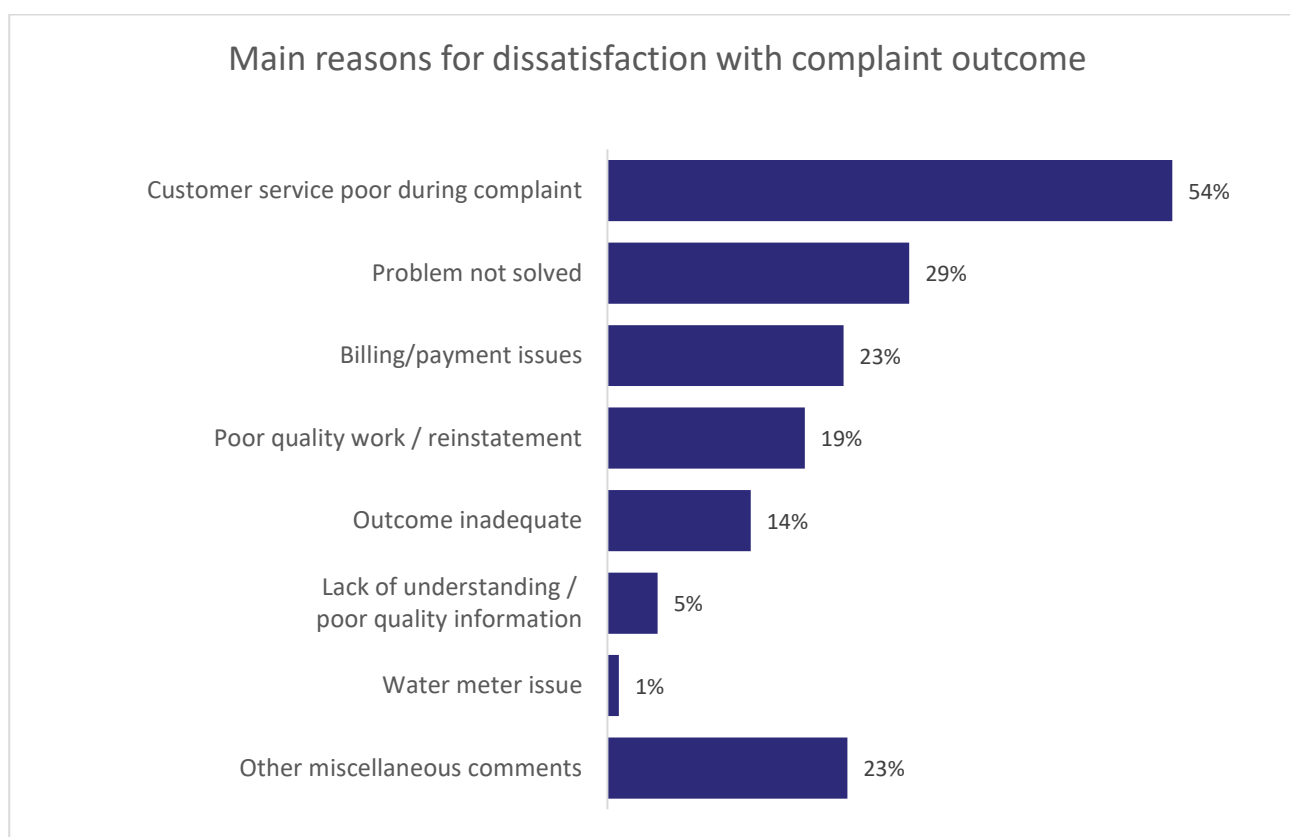
Base: All respondents (506)

Reasons for dissatisfaction with outcome

Those who were not satisfied were asked to give their reasons and these are summarised in [Figure 13](#).

Over half (54%) of those who were dissatisfied with the outcome expressed frustrations with one or more instances of poor customer service during their complaint. A more detailed look at these comments includes having no interest in customers (16%), having to contact multiple times to get response (14%), not taking ownership of the problem (14%), being hard to contact (8%) and their initial complaint being ignored (7%). Whilst these comments are not strictly relevant to their satisfaction with the final outcome, it is clearly a worrying reflection on the overall complaint handling process and likely to be a contributory factor to a lack of satisfaction with the outcome. This will particularly impact on their sense of their complaint being given appropriate consideration.

Figure 13: Reason dissatisfied with complaint outcome

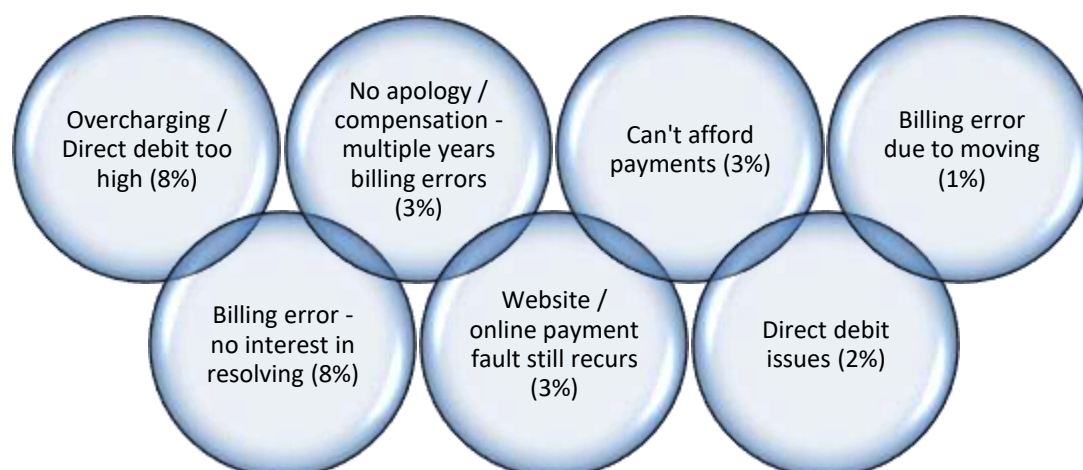


Base: Those not satisfied with outcome of complaint (278 people)

Nearly three in ten (29%) stated that the problem had not been resolved and again this included a range of more detailed and overlapping comments including that the fundamental issue remains (13%) or the same issue continually recurs (3%).

Almost as many (23%) referred to a billing or payment issue and this often seems to reflect a disagreement about the level of the bill which is not resolved. The comments can be broken down into some core categories as in [Figure 14](#)³.

³ Note: some respondents have made more than one comment about billing and the sum of comments is therefore more than 23%

Figure 14: Summary of reasons for dissatisfaction connected to billing

The outcome was perceived as inadequate by 14%, the majority of whom felt that they had not been provided with a clear, sufficient explanation for the complaint. Of some particular concern is the 3% who said they hadn't received an outcome at all, and their complaint was ongoing (this was despite the sample used consisting of complaints considered closed by the water company).

A Complaint Review: Stage 2

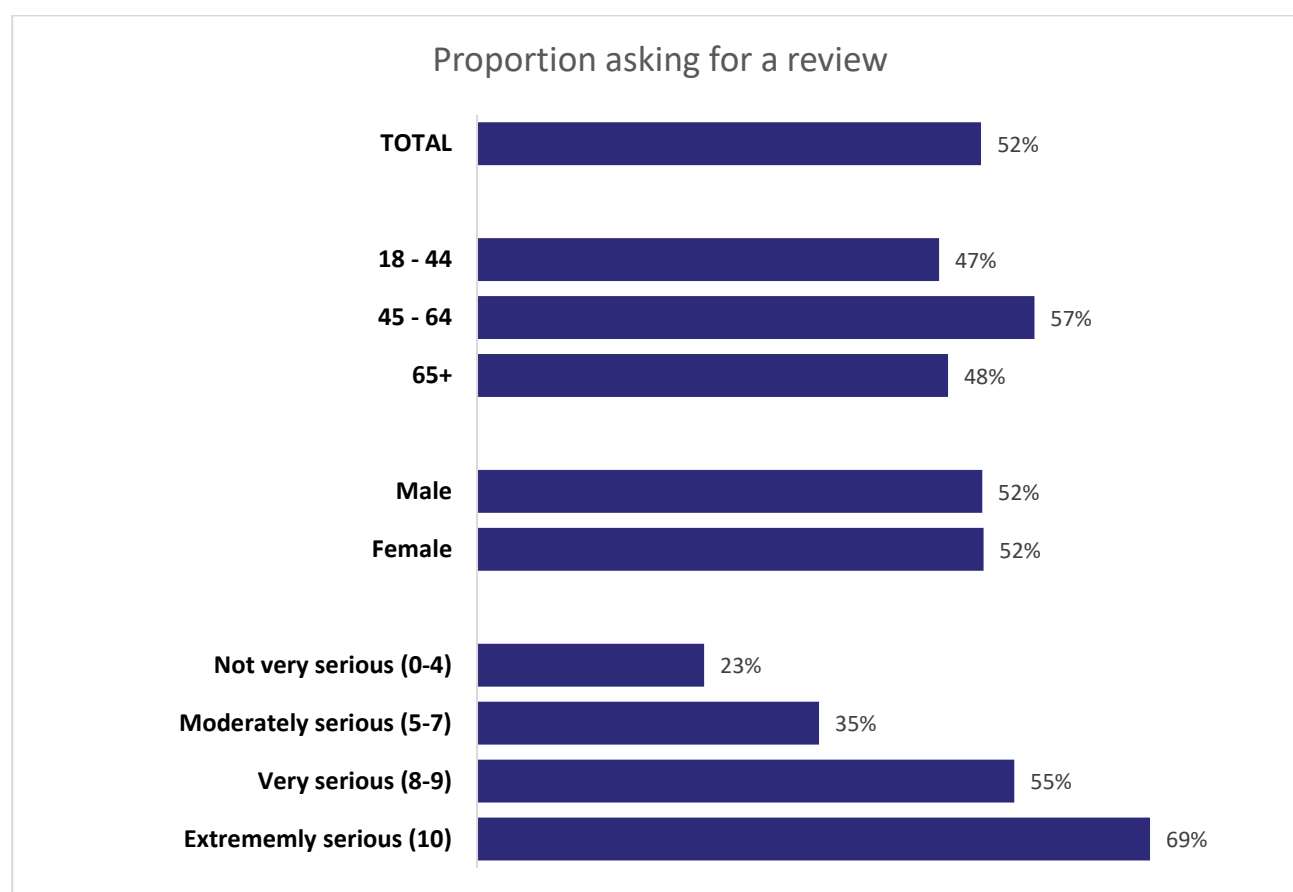
Half of those unhappy with complaint outcome did not ask for a review

Anybody who is not completely satisfied with the outcome of their complaint should have the opportunity to ask for their complaint to be reviewed. Within our sample only half of those entitled to ask for a review chose to do so.

With a relatively small sample there are no statistically significant differences by age or gender and a larger research exercise would be needed to explore whether those aged 45 – 64 are actually more likely to ask for a review.

As elsewhere, there is a clear correlation by perceived seriousness of the complaint and requesting a review. Not surprisingly, those who did not consider their initial complaint to be very serious are less inclined to request a review – presumably believing that it does not warrant the required effort. Those with the more serious complaints are significantly more likely to have asked for a review.

Figure 15: Proportion of those not satisfied asking for a review



Base: Those not satisfied with outcome (278 people)

Three in ten didn't realise a review was an option

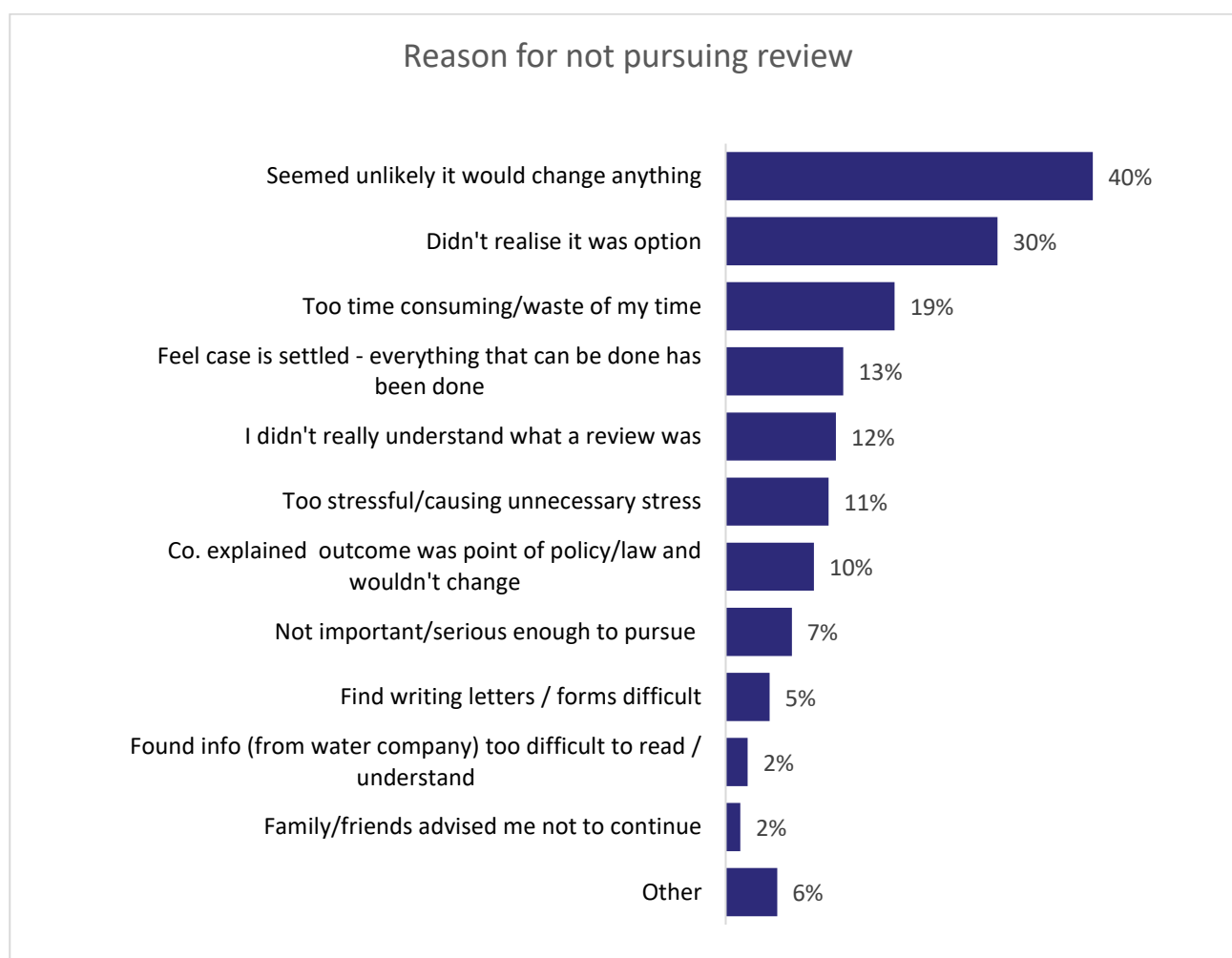
The most common reason given for not pursuing a review was the feeling that it was unlikely to change anything (40%). However, a particular cause for concern is the three in ten (30%) dissatisfied complainants who said they did not realise that asking for a review was an option. Even if we allow for some over-claiming

on this point – perhaps post rationalising their lack of action – this is a notable proportion failing to understand their rights. This is a clear barrier to the smooth running of the complaints process.

Other reasons given for not pursuing a review suggest indirect barriers such as being too time-consuming (19%) and stressful (11%).

A relatively small number of people raised issues which suggests that literacy or education were issues, with 5% saying they found letter writing / form filling difficult and 2% finding the information they received was too difficult to read or understand. Whilst these are a relatively low proportion of our sample, we should acknowledge that the methodology used would have also disadvantaged this group (email invitations and online self-completion), our findings may therefore underestimate this particular barrier.

Figure 16: Reason for not pursuing review



Base: Those not satisfied with outcome but not asking for review (124 people)

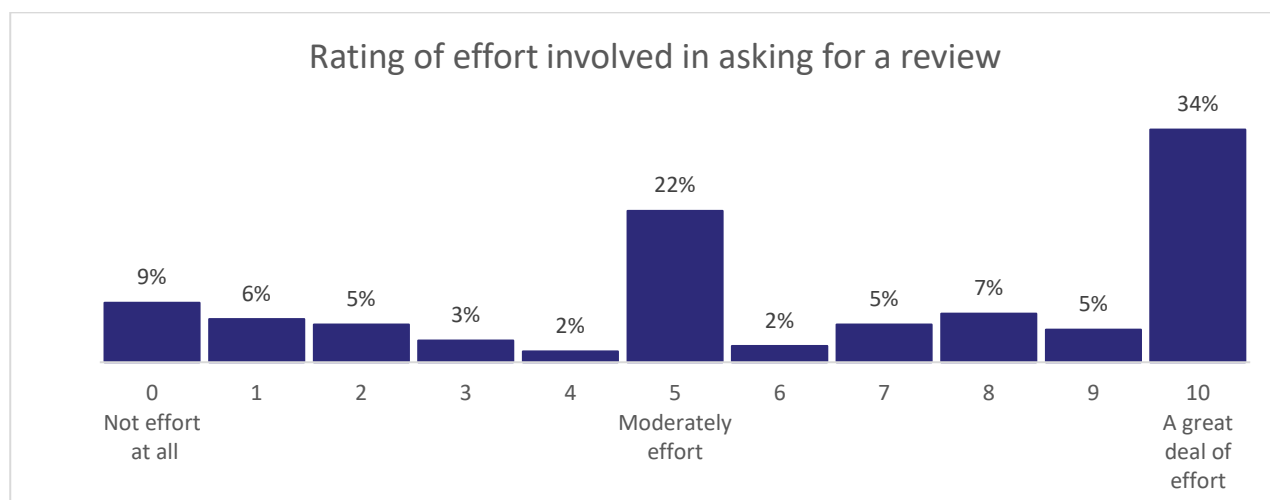
Due to relatively small samples with each particular issue it is hard to draw conclusions around which barriers most affect different complaints. However, a high proportion (29%) of those complaining about high bills said they did not ask for a review because the process was too stressful, even where they felt the issue wasn't resolved. It is important to be aware how, particularly for those on low incomes, uncertainty around bills and a fear of accruing debt is a cause of stress. Our case studies include a woman who gave up on the complaints process and simply stopped paying her bill as a way of getting the Water Company's attention.

Effort required to ask for a review

In order to help with an understanding of the barriers to asking for a review we asked those who had done so how much effort they felt was required to take this next step.

Around a third of this group (34%) felt that it had taken a great deal of effort (score of 10) to ask for a review, whilst almost one in ten (9%) felt it had been no effort at all (score of 0).

Figure 17: Effort involved in asking for a review

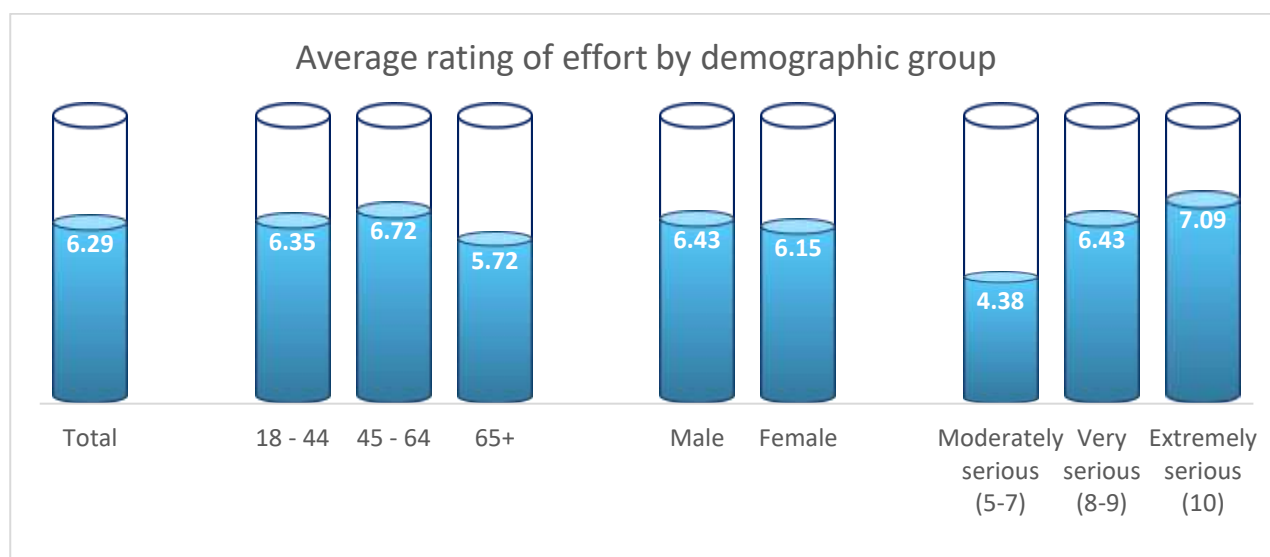


Base: All those who asked for a review (128)

As seen with the average ratings of effort to make a complaint, over 65s appear to feel asking for a review is less effort than those aged 45 - 64, although the difference is not statistically significant. Again, this needs to be explored— is the perceived effort in asking for a review also dependent on the time and resources available to the complainant when pursuing that review?

There is an apparent correlation between how serious a complaint was initially perceived to be and how much effort it took to ask for a review. Again, we must consider cause and effect – those who perceived their complaint to be less serious are less likely to invest effort in pursuing a review and thus are only likely have requested a review if they found it required little effort on their part.

Figure 18: Average effort for asking for a review by demographic group



Base: All those who asked for a review (128)

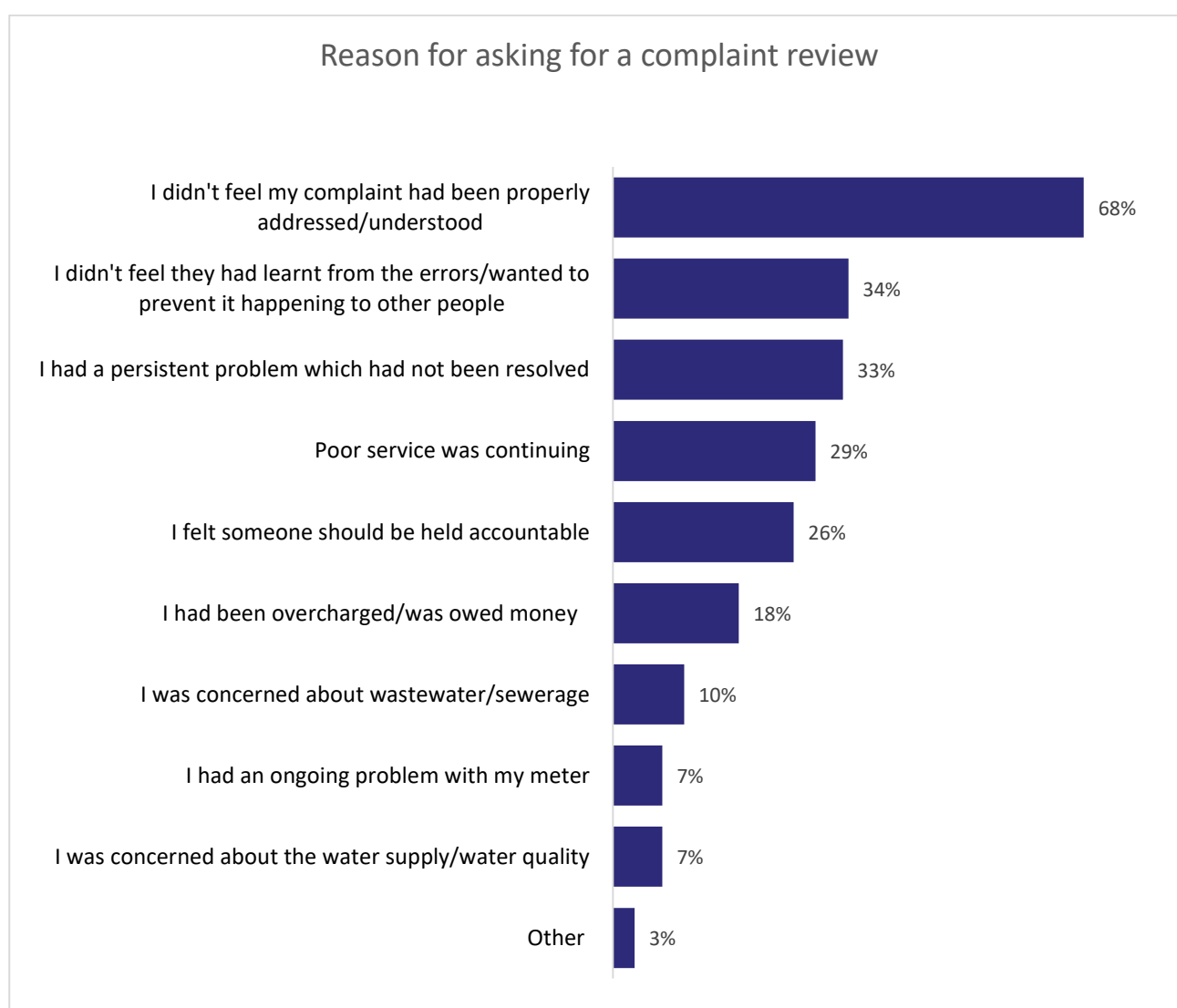
Reviews requested when complaint wasn't fully addressed or understood

Amongst those who had requested a review, two in three (68%) had done so because they believed their complaint had not been properly addressed or understood.

Around one in three (34%) felt that the water company hadn't learnt from their errors and were motivated by wanting to prevent the same situation from happening to others. A similar proportion (33%) claimed to have a persistent problem which simply hadn't been resolved.

Slightly smaller proportions mentioned continuing poor service and a desire to see someone held accountable.

Figure 19: Reason for asking for a complaint review



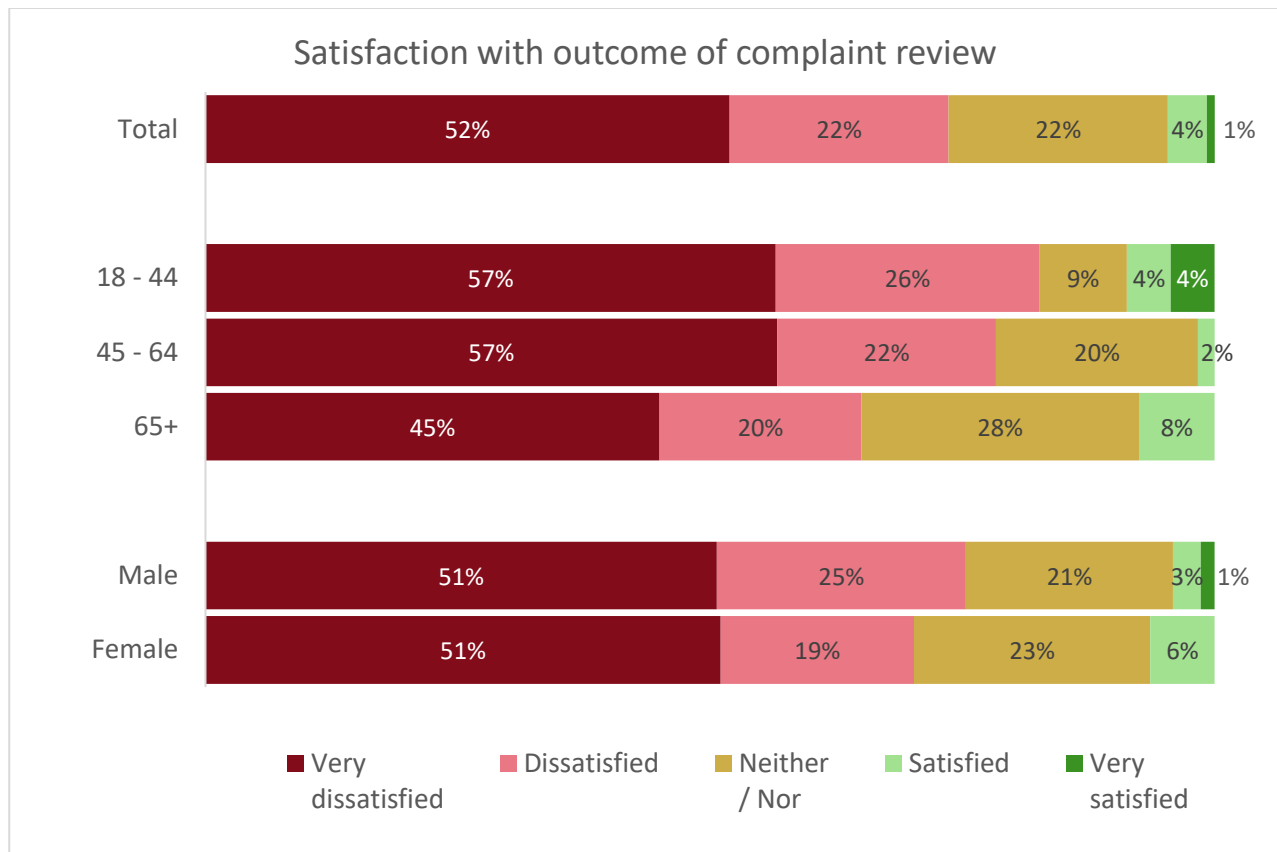
Base: Those asking for a complaint review (126 people)

Only one in twenty satisfied with outcome of complaint review

Just five percent of those requesting a review were satisfied with the outcome whilst over half (52%) claimed to be very dissatisfied. This suggests that this stage in the complaints process has a limited impact on customer satisfaction.

The overall sample size was small, and caution is needed when considering any sub-group differences. The data indicates that those aged 45- 64 may be less satisfied but larger sample sizes would be needed to explore if these differences are real rather than a sampling effect.

Figure 20: Satisfaction with outcome of complaint review



Base: All those who asked for a complaint review (129 people)

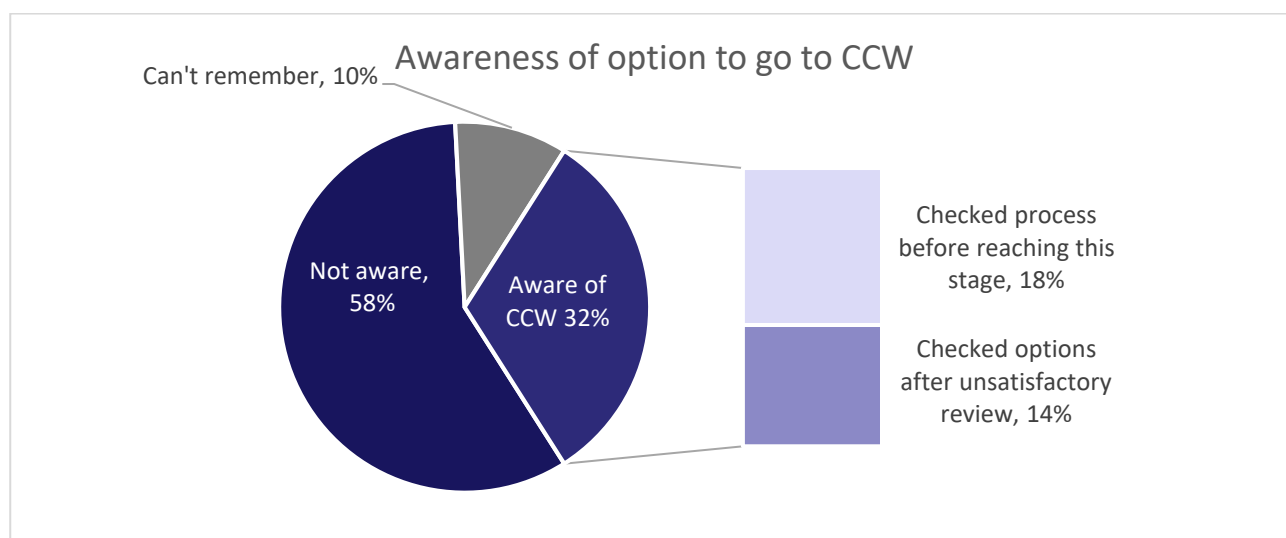
Going to CCW: Stage 3

Awareness of option to go to CCW

All those who had been through a complaint review were asked about their awareness of the option to go to CCW in the event they were not satisfied with the outcome of their review.

The process is not completely clear to complainants with just one in three (32%) understanding the option to go to CCW if they were dissatisfied with their review outcome.

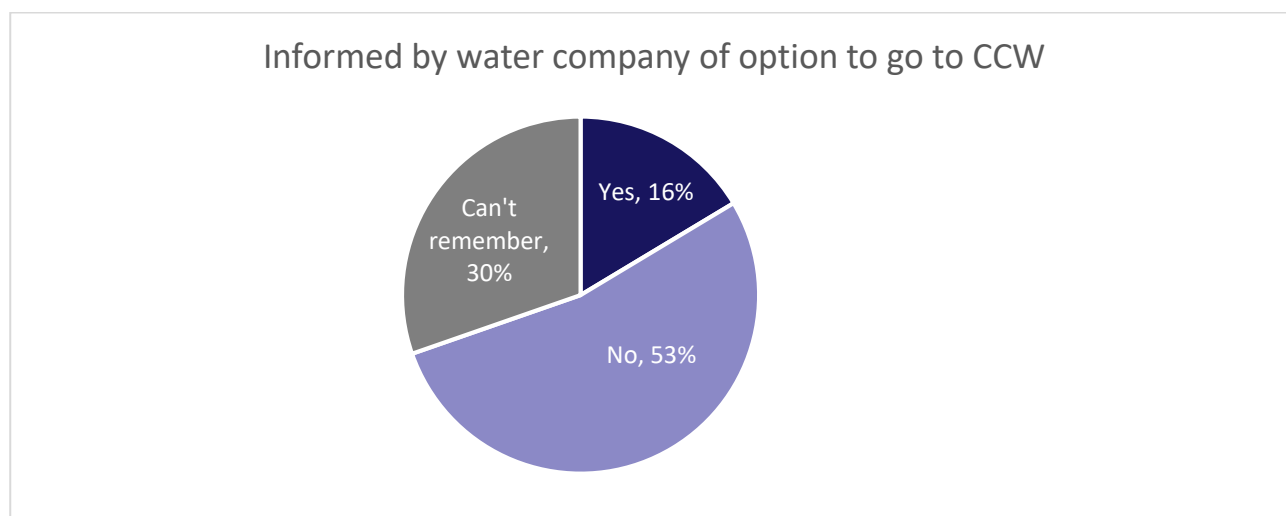
Figure 21: Awareness of option to go to CCW



Base: Those having a review (122 people)

Water companies should keep complainants informed of the options available to them as part of the complaint process. Water companies are required to signpost to CCW when closing a review (stage 2) complaint but amongst our sample, most did not recollect receiving this information. This suggests there is room to improve the signposting, making it clearer and more memorable to consumers in the company letters and conversations.

Figure 22: Informed by water company of option to go to CCW



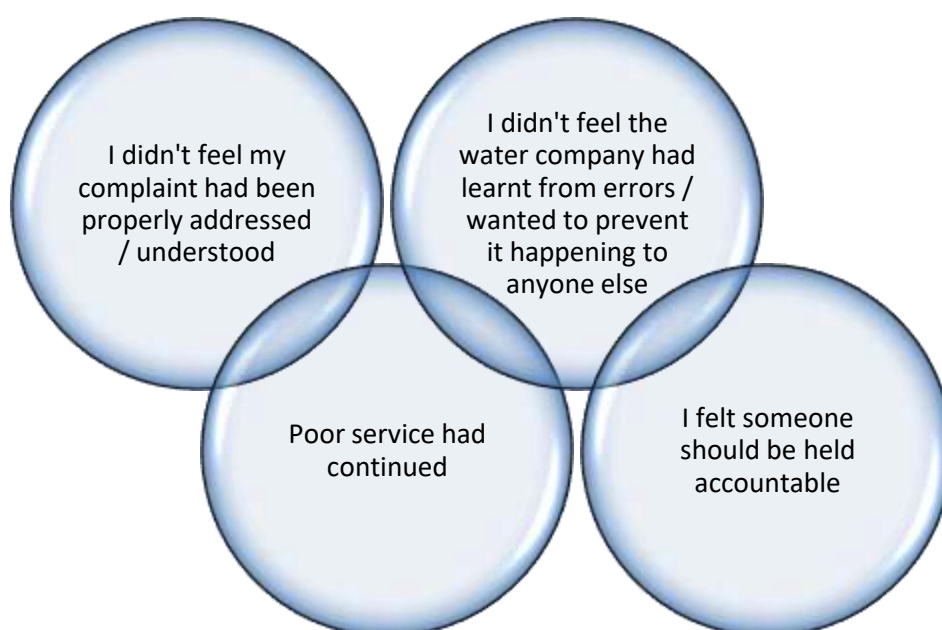
Base: Those having a review (122 people)

Only one in seven went to CCW

Of those dissatisfied with the outcome of the review process just 15% opted to go to CCW. This amounts to just eighteen people and with such a small sample we must be cautious about drawing any conclusion around the experience.

The effort required to make a complaint was given an average of 5.72 out of 10, a very similar score to that of making the initial complaint to the water company (5.63).

Complainants were motivated to pursue their complaint to CCW for many of the same reasons as they went through the review process.



The Complaints Process Overall

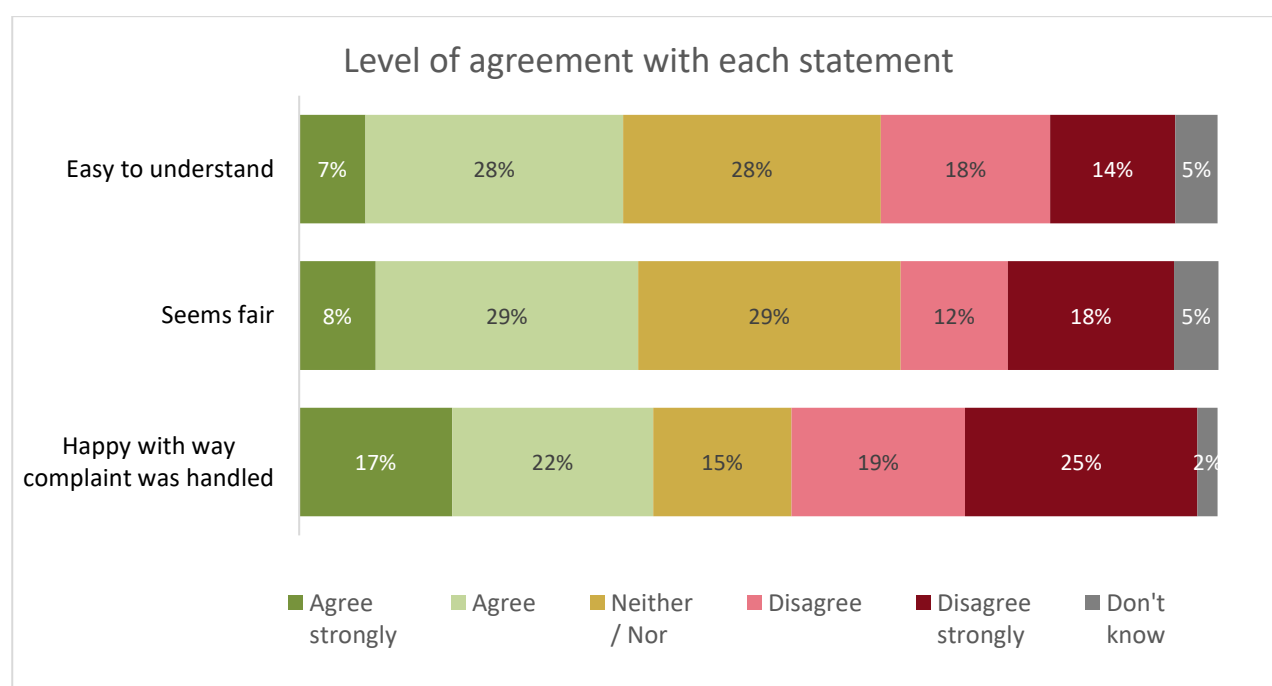
All respondents were asked a series of questions about how they felt about the complaints process.

Only four in ten were happy with how their complaint was handled

Overall, just over one in three (35%) agree that the complaints process is easy to understand and a similar proportion (37%) that it seems fair. For both these questions a high proportion of complainants were neutral with nearly three in ten neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statements.

A potentially disappointing 39% agreed they were happy with the way that their complaint was handled whilst slightly more (44%) disagreed.

Figure 23: Agreement with elements of the complaints process



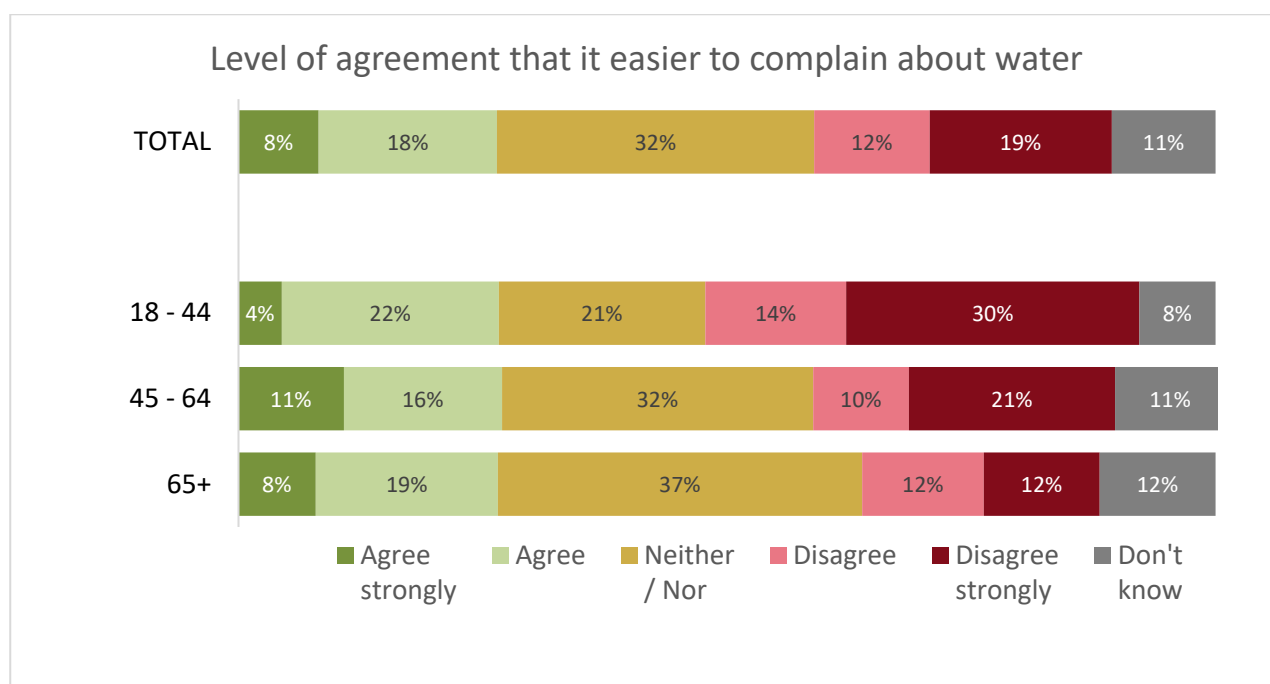
Base: All respondents (499 people)

Ease of the complaints process compared with other industries

Our final area of questioning looked to understand how the water industry complaints process compared with that for other utilities and services such as electricity, gas and broadband. Clearly the ability to make such comparisons is impacted by any experience with other complaint processes and to some extent this is based on perceptions.

Just over one in four (26%) agreed the water industry complaints process was easier whilst a large proportion chose a neutral option of neither agree nor disagree (32%) or don't know (11%).

Three in ten (30%) disagreed with this statement with some correlation by age with those aged 18-44 more likely to disagree compared with older respondents. It should be noted this is largely due to a higher use of neutral answers amongst older respondents than a higher level of agreement.

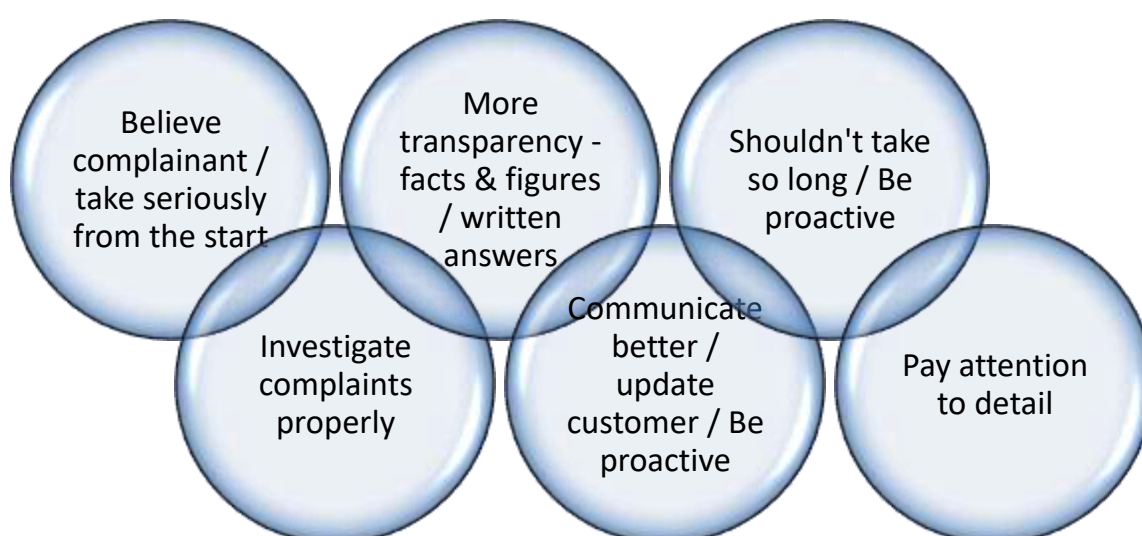
Figure 24: Agreement that easier to complain about water industry than other service

Base: All respondents (499 people)

Comments on how to improve the process

All those included in the online complainant survey were asked if there was anything they wanted to say about the complaints process and how it could be made easier. Almost half (48%) chose not to make a comment which suggests they have not encountered any specific barriers which need to be removed.

Those comments that were received varied widely and reflected back on individual experiences. Highlighted below are some of the key themes on areas for improvement.



Case Studies

Leak in neighbouring pipework

The problem

We moved into this house four years ago, and immediately after moving in we noticed water trickling into our rear yard, so we raised the issue with the Water Company assuming it was coming from their system.

In a nutshell, they were adamant that the water was not coming from their system. I kept complaining because I didn't accept that, and I was convinced they were wrong, and eventually four years later they found a leak in their pipe. As soon as the pipe was repaired the water coming into my backyard stopped, proving that their leak was causing the water damage in my property.

The experience of complaining

I first contacted them online, and as a result of that, received a phone call. Initially I was quite encouraged they were taking this seriously; they were going to send their engineers out and try to get the bottom of it.

I did have one point of contact and he was good at keeping me updated. He would end each call summarising the next steps and provide a date when he would next be in touch.

The frustration was that they weren't proactive in trying to find the leak. It seemed they tried the first, easiest option and then they went away until I pushed them to explore the next option. They are the experts in finding water leaks, they should be exhausting every possibility before saying it's not their fault.

I didn't ask for a review because I thought it would be a waste of time. At one point they sent details on making a claim but there was an awful lot of work and expense for me. I should have pursued it further but, in all honesty, I am just so stressed from the last four years, and I have spent so much money to get to where we are now, I don't have the energy to fight the Water Company.

...the worst part of the whole thing, that they have clearly caused this damage and expense but weren't going to do anything to help me. It was as if they were putting a whole load more hurdles in front of me, hoops that I had to jump through to try and put the situation right, and that seems absolutely appalling to me, terrible way to treat any customer

Water companies need to be much more sympathetic to people like me when they need to put an insurance claim in.

The impact

Water damage to a property is a huge, huge issue, one of the biggest worries for a homeowner, we had this for four years. I felt I knew the cause of it, but they didn't deal with it. It was quite a stressful time for us anyway so to have that hanging over us for all that time was awful, it was quite a worry, quite stressful.

Then there was the financial side, since the water board were adamant that it wasn't their leak, so we paid £1,000's for building work to try and resolve this issue and that expense shouldn't fall to me. The replastering done when we first moved in became damp as a direct result of the leak so we are also facing the cost of getting that repaired. It has left a very, very bitter taste.

Water meter readings

The problem

I moved into my new home and asked for a meter reading but they said I had to take my own reading. I explained that I'm disabled. I can't even get to my front gate, can you come and read it for me?'

"We can't give you a meter reading, you will have to go out on the pavement, lift a little hatch up, lean down into the pavement and read the meter that way"

I now have a direct debit to pay £20 a month but I've been there six months and I still haven't had a meter reading.

I don't know how much water I'm using, whether my direct debit is correct, whether it should be more or less. I really think somebody

should come and read my meter and then confirm how much I owe and how much I need to pay each month.

The experience of complaining

I wasn't satisfied with their reply which really just said 'that's the way it is', although not in those exact words. I'd explained I can't crawl on the pavement to read a meter. They weren't even apologetic; they weren't trying to make things better for me or anybody else for that matter.

The issue hasn't been resolved and I still don't have an accurate bill.

They didn't tell me I had any other options, they didn't say you could go to an Ombudsman or there is a stage 2 complaint process. I think they should inform people that, if they are not satisfied, they can take their complaint further. I gave up at this point because dealing with the water board was not number one priority at the time.

I would like to take it further; the issue is not just personal to me it must affect hundreds of thousands of people. There are loads of bungalows where I live, all disabled and elderly people and why should they be expected to crawl about on a pavement. It is almost like a comedy isn't it, you can imagine all these people crawling about on the pavement trying to read their water meters.

If they had explained the review process, I think I would have followed it up.

The impact

I don't know whether to turn my taps on or not. If I had a meter, I could watch the little dial going round and think, 'can I water my garden?'

I have no idea of how much water I am using. I don't know if I'm running up a debt.

Stop giving massive, big bonuses to shareholders and sort out people's water meters



Sewage leak

The problem

I opened my door to see raw sewage was pouring out of a manhole, it was coming out of the drain and going towards the road, I wasn't sure who to call and started with environmental health and they said you need to call the water company. I was told someone would arrive within five days, 'my jaw hit the ground' but they said five days is our standard response time.

The actual leak lasted around 90 minutes and covered my drive so to get off the property we needed to wade through it. My drive is chippings and paving slabs and the sewage was everywhere. I did a clean up so we could get in and out but the stench was terrible.

They came at the very end of the fifth day and created a slightly better path across our drive but took another five days to come and do a proper clear-up. In the meantime, we had a second occurrence of the leak.

The experience of complaining

I called multiple times, maybe as many as twenty. After the initial call, I did try to be calm because it is not the fault of the call handlers and I did feel that some were trying to help but you lose faith when they promise action but nothing happens. I think the frustration is that the protocols were not fit for purpose.

"I was given a named contact but it didn't really help. They were just different GNVQ levels in fobbing you off"

I later found out that in the street away from us they had been dealing with sewage in gardens for over ten days and they hadn't been able to work out the cause. They connected the two incidents eventually and that helped them find the blockage but I don't think the workmen at the first incident were told about my issue for at least five days – because I was just on a to-do list,

they knew nothing about – so prioritising my call would have helped them. Once the blockage was sorted, they did remedial stuff, they took away the chippings and put fresh gravel down. The workmen were great but the interface with the Water Company was just awful.

I am not necessarily sure that I knew that I could follow up my complaint.

This is a problem with privatised utilities because the customer is less important than the shareholder. Maybe I was just unlucky, but I hope someone is challenging Water Company's performance and telling them a five day response time for this type of incident isn't good enough.

Impact

I still feel angry, we were living with the smell for over a week and it felt dangerous to be near so much raw sewage.

We felt housebound as we didn't want to be going across the driveway more than was essential.

It was also little things, I put a notice and a box out for the postman and cancelled the papers as I couldn't expect them to walk through the sewage to the door.

"I am quite persistent and I am quite stubborn, but you get to the stage where you just can't be bothered anymore, because at some stage the brick wall wins and your head just hurts too much."



Billing issues

The problem

When I moved house there was an administrative error transferring to my new address even though I did everything properly and sent them a meter reading as soon as I moved in. I have tried to set up an account to pay but it won't let me, it keeps going back to my old address. At first, I just continued to pay my standing order and thought it would get sorted eventually.

I phoned them 17 times, I emailed them 13 times asking them to get in touch with me and tell me what the problem is, and I heard absolutely nothing. Every time I rang them, they had an answerphone service saying you've got a 20 minute, 25 minute, once even 40 minutes wait. It said, 'if you don't want to wait you press 1 and we will call you back when your turn comes in the queue'. I did that 13 times and they never rang back. So then I just stopped paying my standing order as I figured they would then sort it out and send me a bill.

"we've charged you wrongly from one account to another, you opened another account to transfer it over but it never got transferred over and the bill is wrong"

Then I got a letter saying they were taking me to court – no bill or contact to try and sort the problem out. When I finally managed to speak to someone, they admitted all my bills had been messed up and it was their fault.

However, now the bills seem very high and they're mounting up and I can't understand why they are so much higher than when I was on a meter before. I was very fed-up and confused and the call handler said you can complain so I did.



The experience of complaining

I emailed a complaint and eventually got an email back from them which was a load of rubbish. Their response didn't really seem to marry up to the problem I had, I thought it was meant for someone else. I told them that I had rung them 17 times and they'd never rung me back, the first line simply said, 'we apologise for any problem you have had'.

I know at the end it said, 'if you have any further complaints please contact us,' but, of course, I couldn't be bothered. I just want to get on with my life.

I am going to complain again though because of I've received my next bill which is too high and I still can't open an account to pay which they promised to resolve.

"I remember reading the email and thinking I don't really know what they are going on about, and I'm not stupid I have got a brain, but it wasn't made easy"

Impact

I feel I just have to wait until they threaten to take me to court again, then they will listen to me. It is just ridiculous and it has caused me so much stress.

I am on incapacity benefit, so I don't have spare money for a large bill. I have been putting money aside so I can pay when it is sorted but only what I used to pay before and the new bills are much higher. On this new estate everyone thinks their bills are high and there seem to be a number of leaks so I am worried what I might owe.

Conclusions

Just over one in eight householders (12%) have been dissatisfied with their water company in the past year. However, only just over half of those who said they were dissatisfied had actually contacted their water company. This suggests a level of hidden dissatisfaction with around 6% of bill payers being unhappy with the service they receive but not actively contacting their supplier.

The most common causes of dissatisfaction raised were 'water quality' and that their 'bills were too high', although householders had a higher propensity to complain if the issue related to their bills.

The six per cent who have never complained

The first 'leak' in the complaints process is therefore seen amongst the 6.1% of people who choose not to complain despite being dissatisfied.

It is perhaps reassuring that for around a fifth of this group of people (1.3% overall) the issue wasn't considered serious enough to pursue. However, this kind of low level dissatisfaction will clearly colour any discussion of the industry and has the potential to affect future interactions.

Of more concern are those who don't complain because they don't expect it to make any difference. This suggests either a low expectation of the industry or a previous poor experience. Comments such as '*unlikely to change anything*', '*don't think they would have resolved*', '*have complained before without success*' suggests a certain amount of resignation.

A third group consists of people for whom the issues clearly impacted more than one household in their area, usually relating to a loss of service and these were addressed by neighbours making contact or finding information about the issue online.

A minor issue is the very small percentage of householders who didn't know how to make a complaint. This is a very small proportion of bill payers and this survey did not investigate whether they tried to find out how to complain. This amounts to 0.25% of bill payers being dissatisfied but not knowing how to complain, which we estimate to be in the region of 60,000 people⁴.

Effort versus seriousness

The range of complaints included within this study ranged from administrative errors to major issues with sewage or loss of supply. As part of the survey complainants were therefore asked to rate how serious they considered their issue to be using a scale of 0 – 10. Within our sample there were a number of people who felt their complaint was more of a query or feedback than a genuine complaint – and companies are using a fairly wide definition of complaints. However, there were also some who having initially enquired were dissatisfied with the response and went on to complain.

Older customers were more likely to complain at a lower level of seriousness than those of working age and we could theorise that younger customers are more likely to be 'time poor' and thus need an issue to be more serious before they take action. Over 65s seemed to feel that making a complaint was less effort than those aged 45 - 64. This may benefit from further research – does the complaint system favour this cohort of customers. Is it about having time and inclination to make a complaint or do younger people have higher expectations of a streamlined approach?

⁴ We have used an estimate of 23.8m households receiving water bill based on Ofwat data <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/regulated-companies/company-obligations/performance/companies-performance-2011-12/properties-billed-and-metering-rates-2011-12/>

There is a clear correlation between the effort people are willing to make and the seriousness of the complaint. This is a logical finding; it seems rational that there is an 'effort' barrier where those with less serious issues do not enter the complaints process whereas the very or extremely serious complaints are pursued because they are felt to better warrant the required amount of effort.

Almost half are dissatisfied with complaint outcome

Amongst those who had made a stage 1 complaint almost half were dissatisfied with the outcome. There is also a clear correlation with the level of seriousness – those who considered their complaint to be extremely serious are significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

Over half of those who were dissatisfied with the outcome expressed frustrations with one or more instances of poor customer service during their complaint. Nearly three in ten stated that the problem had not been resolved and the outcome was perceived as inadequate by 14%, the majority of whom felt that they had not been provided with a clear, sufficient explanation for the complaint.

Of some particular concern is the, admittedly small, proportion who said they hadn't received an outcome at all, and their complaint was ongoing despite it being considered closed by the water company.

Barriers to a complaint review

Within our study only half of those entitled to ask for a review chose to do so. With a relatively small sample there are no statistically significant differences by age or gender and a larger research exercise would be needed to explore any age differences.

There is a clear correlation by perceived seriousness of the complaint and requesting a review with those who did not consider their initial complaint to be very serious and less inclined to request a review – presumably believing that it does not warrant the required additional effort.

The most common reason given for not pursuing a review was the feeling that it was unlikely to change anything (40%). However, a particular cause for concern is the three in ten (30%) dissatisfied complainants who said they did not realise that asking for a review was an option. This is a notable proportion failing to understand their rights and a clear barrier to the smooth running of the complaints process.

Other reasons suggest indirect barriers such as being too time-consuming and stressful contribute to the number of people not requesting a review.

A relatively small number of people raised issues which suggests that literacy or education were issues, with 5% saying they found letter writing / form filling difficult and 2% finding the information they received was too difficult to read or understand. Whilst these are a relatively low proportion of our sample, we should acknowledge that the online methodology would have also disadvantaged this group (email invitations and online self-completion), and our findings may therefore underestimate this particular barrier.

What encourages people to ask for a complaint review

Amongst those who had requested a review, most believed their initial complaint had not been properly addressed or understood, including a number with a persistent problem which simply hadn't been resolved. Some felt that the water company hadn't learnt from their errors whilst others were motivated by wanting to prevent the same situation from happening to others and a desire to see someone held accountable. All motivations suggesting a perceived need for the water company to listen and understand a customer's concerns.

Amongst those who requested a review just five percent were satisfied with the outcome which suggests this stage has little impact on changing overall customer satisfaction.

Barriers to escalating unresolved complaints to CCW

The next 'leak' in the complaints process is that not all complainants understood they could pursue their complaint further. Just one in three (32%) understood they had the option to go to CCW if they were dissatisfied with their review outcome. This is clear barrier in the process which should be addressed by information provided at the review stage however, only a small number remembered being informed by their water company about CCW, despite this being a standard part of the review outcome process.

Just 15% of those dissatisfied with their review opted to take their complaint to CCW. This amounts to just eighteen people in our study and with such a small sample we must be cautious about drawing any conclusion around the experience.

Complainants were motivated to pursue their complaint to CCW for many of the same reasons as they went through the review process in the first place.

The process overall

Amongst the total sample of complainants four in ten agreed they were happy with the way that their complaint was handled whilst slightly more (44%) disagreed.

When asked about ways the complaints process could be made easier, half chose not to make a comment about their experience which suggests they had no specific concerns. Those that did comment found it hard to distinguish between their own complaint and the complaints process itself. However there, were some clear themes running through their experiences which included:

- Take the complaint seriously from the start and believe the complainant.
- Investigate complaints properly and be proactive in exploring what may have gone wrong.
- Communicate with the customer better during the process and provide updates.
- Provide a more transparent written response with facts and figures that people can understand.

Overall, just over one in three agree that the complaints process is easy to understand and a similar proportion that it seems fair.

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Bill Payer Questionnaire

Bill Payer Questionnaire – Draft

Q1. Have you been dissatisfied with your water and/or sewerage services during the last 12 months?

1. Yes – Go to Q2
 2. No – Skip to Section B
- Refused – Close

Q2. Thinking about the most recent occasion, why were you dissatisfied? **Multi-code**

- Error on my bill
- Bill too high
- Debt/ arrears
- A missed appointment
- Payment terms or time
- Water leak at home
- Water leak somewhere else
- Lost pressure
- supply cut off
- Water quality (e.g. colour, taste, odour)
- Sewer flooding at home
- Sewer flooding somewhere else
- Loss of service (e.g. your toilet not flushing and/or drains blocked)
- Odour
- Poor customer service e.g. not being called back
- Wrong account information e.g. wrong name
- Problem with meter (e.g. not working/ installation)
- Other – other (Please specify)

Q3. On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is not at all serious and 10 is extremely serious how serious do you think this issue was?

- 0 - Not at all serious
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – moderately serious
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – Extremely serious

Q4. Did you contact your water company about this issue?

1. Yes – Go to Q7
2. No – Go to Q5

Refused – Go to Q14

Q5. Why did you not contact your water company? *Probe fully - Multi-code*

1. Didn't seem important / serious enough to pursue further
2. Family / friends advised me not to bother
3. Feel case is settled – nothing more to do
4. Seemed unlikely it would change anything
5. Process too time consuming / waste of my time
6. Process too stressful / causing unnecessary stress
7. Problem was resolved without making a complaint
8. Have complained before without success
9. Bad experience with customer services
10. Don't think they would have resolved
11. Didn't know how to make a complaint
12. Other – please write in

98. Refused

Q6. If you were to face a similar problem in the future what would make you more likely to contact the water company? *Probe fully – write in verbatim*

AFTER Q6 GO TO SECTION B

Q7. Would you consider your contact to have been a complaint or a more general enquiry?

1. Complaint – Go to Q11
2. Enquiry – Go to Q8
3. Refused – Go to Q14

Q8. On a scale of 0 -10 where 0 is no effort at all and 10 is a great deal of effort, how much effort would you say it was to make your enquiry?

- 0 – No effort at all
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – moderate effort
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – A great deal of effort

Q9. Were you satisfied with the outcome of your enquiry?

- Yes Go to Q14

Bill Payer Questionnaire – Draft

Page 2 of 3

- No Go to Q10

Q10. Did you, or might you, go on to make a complaint?

1. Yes – I have made a complaint Go to Q11
2. Yes – I might go on to make a complaint Go to Q14
3. No Go to Q14
4. Refused Go to Q14

Q11. On a scale of 0 -10 where 0 is no effort at all and 10 a great deal of effort, how much effort would you say you it was to make your complaint?

- 0 – No effort at all
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – moderate effort
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – A great deal of effort

Q12. Were you satisfied with the outcome of your complaint?

1. Yes Go to Q14
2. No Go to Q13
3. Not yet heard outcome Go to Q14
- Refused Go to Q14

Q13. Did you, or are you considering escalating the complaint?

1. Yes
2. No

Q14. Is there anything about your experience, that would make you less likely to make contact, or complain, if you faced a similar problem in the future? *Probe fully – write in verbatim*

Bill Payer Questionnaire – Draft

Page 3 of 3

Complaints Questionnaire

Complainant Survey –

Landing page:

This survey is about your experience of making a complaint to your water company. We want to improve the complaint process. We need your help to understand your experience and identify areas for improvement.

It should take less than 10 minutes to complete. To begin the survey, click 'Start' below.

[Water company] has provided your details to us only for the purposes of inviting you to take part in this survey – sharing your information in this way is allowed under data protection legislation as a 'legitimate interest' - and your details will not be used for any other purpose than this research.

The survey is being managed on behalf of the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) by an independent social research company called Opinion Research Services (ORS). All questions are optional and any information you provide will be handled confidentially by ORS. ORS will share your responses, but not your name, with CCW and your water company. Neither CCW nor your company will be able to identify you from the information ORS shares. ORS adhere to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act. All data will be held securely throughout the process and personal data destroyed by ORS by October 2021 following processing and analysis. For more information, please see www.ors.org.uk/privacy and/or www.ccwater.org.uk/privacystatement.

For more information or help completing the questionnaire, please contact Alastair Layne at ORS by email at alastair.layne@ors.org.uk. If you would like to confirm that ORS is a genuine research practice, you can contact the Market Research Society on Freephone 0800 975 9596.

If you would like to talk to CCW directly in relation to this survey, please contact ###, by telephone on ### or by email at ###

QA – Are you aged 18 or over?

- Yes - Continue
- No - Close

Making your Complaint

According to our records you recently complained to [WATER COMPANY]

Q1. What was your complaint about? If you have made more than one complaint, please think about the most recent one in your answers

- Error on my bill
- Bill too high
- Debt/ arrears
- A missed appointment
- Payment terms or time
- Water leak at home
- Water leak somewhere else
- Lost pressure
- Supply cut off
- Water quality (e.g. colour, taste, odour)
- Sewer flooding at home
- Sewer flooding somewhere else
- Loss of service (e.g. your toilet not flushing and/or drains/sewer pipe blocked)
- Odour
- Poor customer service e.g. not being called back
- Wrong account information e.g. wrong name
- Problem with meter (e.g. not working/installation)

Other – other (Please specify)

Q2. On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is not at all serious and 10 is extremely serious how serious do you think this issue was?

- 0 - Not at all serious
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – moderately serious
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – Extremely serious

Q3. On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is no effort at all and 10 a great deal of effort, how much effort would you say you it was to make your enquiry?

- 0 – No effort at all
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – moderate effort

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- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – A great deal of effort

Q4. When you complained to your water company recently, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the outcome of your complaint?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Go to Q19

Go to Q19

Ask Q5

Ask Q5

Ask Q5

Q5. Why do you say that?

Asking for a Review

Q6. Did you ask [Water Company] to review your complaint?

- Yes
- No

Skip to Q9

Answer Q7 / Q8 THEN SKIP TO Q19

Q7. Why did you not ask for your complaint to be reviewed if you were not satisfied with the initial outcome? Please tick as many as apply

- Didn't seem important / serious enough to pursue further
- Family / friends advised me not to continue
- Feel case is settled – everything that can be done has been done
- I didn't really understand what a review was
- Company explained the outcome was a point of policy / law that wouldn't change
- Seemed unlikely it would change anything
- Process too time consuming / waste of my time
- Process too stressful / causing unnecessary stress
- Didn't realise I could ask for complaint to be reviewed
- Found the information (from water company) too difficult to read or understand
- Needed information available in other languages / English not my first language
- I find writing letters or filling in forms difficult
- Other – please write in

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Q8. What might have made you more likely to ask for your complaint to be reviewed?
Please tick as many as apply

- If I had been overcharged / was owed money
- If the poor service had continued
- If I was concerned about the water supply / water quality
- If I was concerned about wastewater / sewerage
- If I had an ongoing problem with my meter
- If I had a persistent problem which had not been resolved
- If there had been clearer information on how the complaint reviews were handled
- If there had been clearer information on how long a complaint review would take
- If there had been clearer information on how to request a complaint review
- If I had more time
- If I had been a quicker process
- If it had been easier to complain online
- If it had been easier to speak to someone directly
- Nothing would have made me more likely to ask for my complaint to be reviewed
- Other – please write in

Q9. On a scale of 0 -10 where 0 is no effort at all and 10 a great deal of effort, how much effort was it to ask for a complaint review?

- 0 – No effort at all
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – moderate effort
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – A great deal of effort

Q10. Why did you choose to ask for a complaint review after the initial response from [Water company]? Multi-code

- I didn't feel my complaint had been properly addressed / understood
- I didn't feel they had learnt from the errors / wanted to prevent it happening to other people
- I felt someone should be held accountable
- I had been overcharged / was owed money
- Poor service was continuing
- I was concerned about the water supply / water quality
- I was concerned about wastewater / sewerage
- I had an ongoing problem with my meter
- I had a persistent problem which had not been resolved
- Other – please write in

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Q11. Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint review?

- Very satisfied Go to Q19
- Satisfied Go to Q19
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Go to Q12
- Dissatisfied Go to Q12
- Very dissatisfied Go to Q12

Following the complaint review, if you are still not satisfied with the outcome you have the right to take your complaint to the independent Consumer Council for Water (CCW).

Q12. Were you aware of the option to take your complaint to CCW?

- Yes – had reviewed the complaints process before reaching this stage
- Yes – researched the options after receiving an unsatisfactory review outcome
- No
- Can't remember

Q13. Did your water company inform you of the option to take your complaint to CCW if you were still dissatisfied when they provided the results of their review?

- Yes
- No
- Can't remember

Taking your Complaint to CCW

Q14. Did you ask CCW to look into your complaint?

- Yes Answer Q15, Q16 and skip to Q19
- No Skip to Q17

Q15. On a scale of 0 -10 where 0 is no effort at all and 10 a great deal of effort, how much effort would you say it was to take your complaint to CCW?

- 0 – No effort at all
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – moderate effort
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – A great deal of effort

Q16. Why did you choose to take your complaint to CCW? Multi-code

- I didn't feel my complaint had been properly addressed / understood
- I didn't feel the water company had learnt from the errors / wanted to prevent it happening to other people / felt someone should be held accountable
- I had been overcharged / was owed money
- Poor service had continued

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The Complaints Process

Q19. How far do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements that have been made about the complaints process for your water company?

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know
The complaints process is easy to understand						
The process seems fair						
I'm happy with the way my complaint was handled						
It was easier to complain to my water company than for other services (electricity, gas, broadband etc.)						

Q20. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the complaints process and how it could be made easier for you? Please write in below

SECTION E: About You

Q21. Do you have a water meter?

- Water meter
- No water meter
- Don't know

The following questions are about you - they help us to ensure we've heard from a broad cross section of people and to understand whether our complaints process is equally accessible to everybody. No information will be reported back to CCW or your water company in a way that it could identify you. There is no obligation to answer any of the questions in this section. If you would rather not answer a particular question, please select 'prefer not to say' or leave blank.

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- I was concerned about the water supply / water quality
- I was concerned about wastewater / sewerage
- I had an ongoing problem with my meter
- I had a persistent problem which had not been resolved
- Due to disability / health issues within our household water supply is especially important
- Other – please write in

AFTER Q16 SKIP TO SECTION Q 19

Q17. Why did you not refer your complaint to Consumer Council for Water (CCW) if you were dissatisfied with the outcome from the [Water Company]? Please tick as many as apply

- Didn't seem important / serious enough to pursue further
- Family / friends advised me not to continue
- Feel case is settled – everything that can be done has been done Company explained the outcome was a point of policy / law that wouldn't change
- Seemed unlikely it would change anything
- Didn't realise there was a way to continue complaint / could go to independent body CCW
- I didn't really understand who CCW are
- Process too time consuming / waste of my time
- Process too stressful / causing unnecessary stress
- Process seemed too complicated
- Found the information too difficult to read or understand
- Needed information available in other languages / English not my first language
- I find writing letters or filling in forms difficult
- Other – please write in

Q18. What might have made you more likely to refer your complaint to CCW? Please tick as many as apply

- If I had been overcharged / was owed money
- If the poor service had continued
- If I was concerned about the water supply / water quality
- If I was concerned about wastewater / sewerage
- If I had an ongoing problem with my meter
- If I had a persistent problem which had not been resolved
- If there had been clearer information on how the complaint would be handled
- If there had been clearer information on how long a complaint would take
- If there had been clearer information on how to pursue a complaint
- If I had more time
- If it had been easier to complain online
- If it had been easier to speak to someone directly
- If I had been able to go to CCW after the first response from my water company
- Other – please write in
- Nothing would have made me more likely to refer my complaint to CCW

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We will be following up this survey with some longer telephone interviews with some of the respondents. Would you be willing for an ORS researcher to speak to you in more detail about your experiences? If you were contacted for a follow-up call you would have the opportunity to refuse at that point or to arrange a convenient time to speak to our researcher

- Yes, I'd be happy to speak in more detail about my experiences
- No, don't want to be contacted again

If Yes

Name:

Contact number:

Thank you for your help with our survey

Thank you for your time

The data we collect from this survey will be analysed and used to make the complaints process as straightforward and accessible as possible for consumers.

If you want to know more about the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) visit their website www.ccwater.org.uk

If you need to contact CCW with a complaint or query unrelated to this survey: Casework team on 0300 034 2222 or email at enquiries@ccwater.org.uk website, www.ccwater.org.uk

Q22. Which of these age categories do you fit into?

- 18 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 – 74
- 75+
- Prefer not to say

Q23. Are you

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

Q24. Which of these best describes you?

- Working full-time (31 or more hours per week)
- Working part-time (less than 31 hours per week)
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Retired from paid work
- Student in full-time education
- Looking after the home or family
- Long-term sick or disabled
- Prefer not to say

Q25 Do you, or anyone else currently living as part of your household, suffer from any life limiting health problems such as: long-term illness, disability or infirmity – including problems associated with old age, childhood asthma etc.?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer

Q26. What is your ethnic group?

- White British
- Any other white background
- Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
- Asian / Asian British
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- Any other ethnic group
- Prefer not to say