



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr



Customer Contact Matters

INSIGHT FROM WATER MATTERS 2025

Water Matters report – what are the findings telling us?

It has been a few months since CCW published our latest [Water Matters](#) tracking survey, back in May. As the longest-running in-depth survey of water customers, this research gathers a lot of detail, which is why we are once more following up with a series of shorter ‘mini reports’. These will each look in greater depth at specific themes from the latest Water Matters data.

This summary looks at customer contact – in terms of customer satisfaction with how companies deal with customer complaints/queries, as well as views on companies’ communication around services and plans. This helps us understand whether companies are committed to delivering a truly customer-focused culture.

Headline findings

- Water customers are more likely than ever to contact their water companies.
- Satisfaction with contact has shown a very slight improvement from last year’s record low score.
- We have seen a significant increase in the number of customers contacting their company with billing enquiries – now making up a third of all customer contact.
- More customers felt their company communicated well about services/plans – but there is still room for further improvement.
- When it comes to positive customer contact, there is still significant variation between companies.

Customer contact is rising – but satisfaction is struggling to keep pace

In this year’s Water Matters survey, over a quarter of customers (27%) in England & Wales said that they had had some form of contact with their water and/or sewerage company in the past 12 months. This number has been steadily climbing over recent years, and is at its highest level since the survey began.

Last year’s report found satisfaction with customer contact at its lowest-ever level. This year, there were small improvements – albeit not statistically significant – with overall satisfaction now at 75%, up from 74% last year. The score for Wales is slightly higher (79%), though unchanged from last year – though, as will be explored, the overall average scores do not tell the full story.

However, while this improvement is a step in the right direction, it remains the case that, across England and Wales, overall satisfaction is still below the rolling average score over the past decade (78%). One issue is that, while most of the components that make up overall satisfaction with customer contact saw rises this year, there was a noticeable continued decline for ‘knowledge and professionalism of staff’. This prevented the overall satisfaction score from being greater. CCW has, through carrying out complaints assessments with companies, identified areas of front-line service that could be improved. Our recommendations have included; further training on key topic

areas and processes, tone of voice refreshers and ensuring the right people are in the right roles.

More significant still is that we saw this year a wider gap than ever before between the highest and lowest scoring companies on satisfaction with contact: while half of companies managed to improve their score from last year, continued falls from the remaining companies prevented the overall satisfaction score from rising further. There is clearly more to be done in terms of sharing and learning from best practice between companies, when it comes to successfully helping customers who get in touch with an issue. The fact that satisfaction scores can vary so significantly year-on-year shows that this is an area which companies can influence comparatively quickly.

Table 1: Overall satisfaction with customer contact by company, and change from last year¹

Company	Satisfaction with customer contact (2024)	Change from last year (+/-)
Southern Water	80%	28%
Essex & Suffolk Water	95%	16%
Hafren Dyfrdwy	86%	15%
United Utilities	84%	7%
South Staffs Water	73%	7%
Wessex Water	79%	6%
Yorkshire Water	87%	6%
Bristol Water	90%	6%
Portsmouth Water	80%	6%
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water	79%	0%
Severn Trent Water	73%	-1%
Thames Water	67%	-2%
South West Water	80%	-4%
Anglian Water	77%	-5%
South East Water	56%	-6%
Cambridge Water	71%	-11%
Affinity Water	69%	-12%
Northumbrian Water	80%	-14%
SES Water	55%	-23%

Customer contact is increasingly focused on the issue of bills

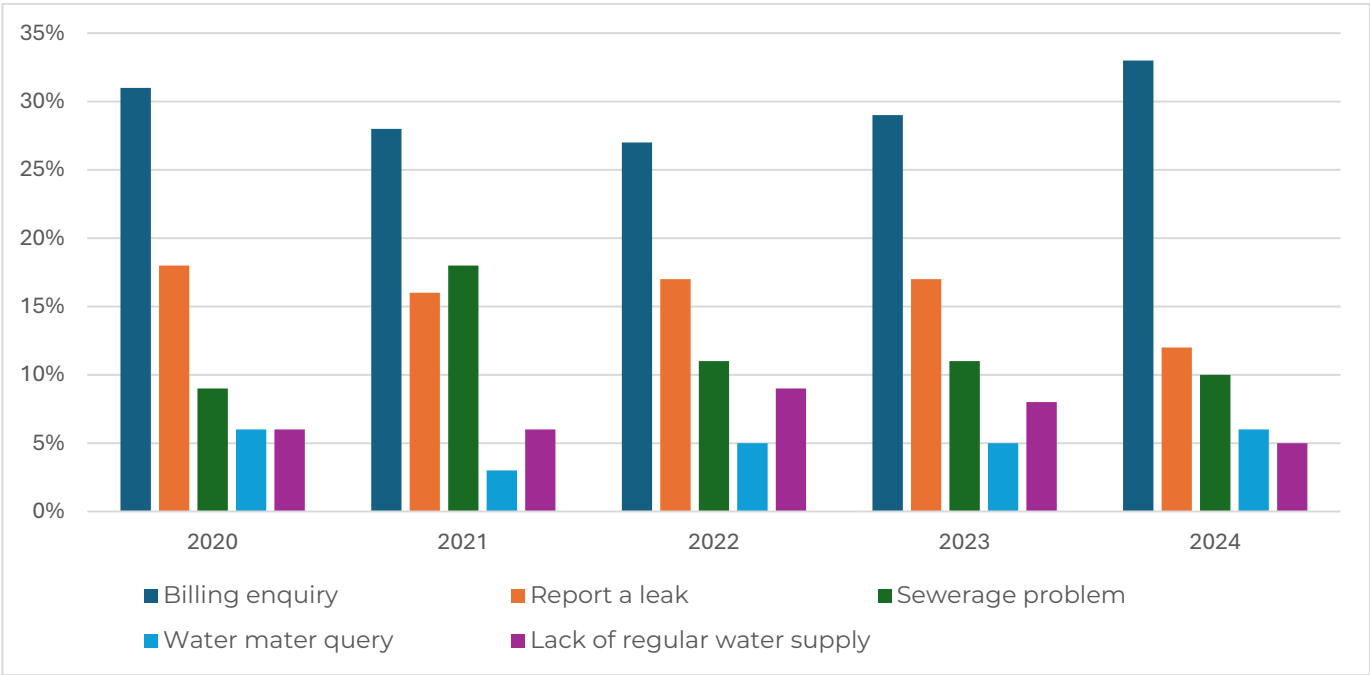
One of the more notable findings from this year’s Water Matters was around customer contact – specifically, that ‘billing enquiry’ represents a larger proportion of contact issues than ever before. A third of all customer contact (33%) is now around bills/billing, up from 29% last year – for context, the next most common reason (to report a leak) made up only 12% of contact. While Water Matters looks at all forms of contact, including enquiries, our forthcoming Household Complaints report also shows that complaints, specifically, about the scale of bill increases are also increasing.

This is not surprising, coming as it does amidst the backdrop of increasing financial pressures, with more than a third (37%) of customers in England and Wales thinking

¹ As this question deals specifically with customers who had contacted their company in the past 12 months, in some cases this results in small sample sizes.

their household’s financial situation will change for the worse in the coming year. We will explore this further in a subsequent ‘mini matters’ report on affordability.

Figure 1: Most common reasons for contacting water/sewerage company over the past five years



More generally, when looking at all customers – rather than just those who said they had contacted their company in the past 12 months – we saw a 2% rise this year in customers across England and Wales who said they would be likely to contact their water/sewerage company if they were worried about paying their bill. This suggests that rising bills are now more at the front of customers’ minds, as our recent [Water Worries](#) research showed.

However, still only 70% of customers in England said they would be likely to contact their company if concerned about being able to pay their bill – which is actually down slightly from the 10-year average score for this question – and in Wales it is only 66%. This is a cause for concern given that there is now better support than ever before for customers who are struggling to afford their water bill.

Better communication with customers about services is the key to rebuilding satisfaction

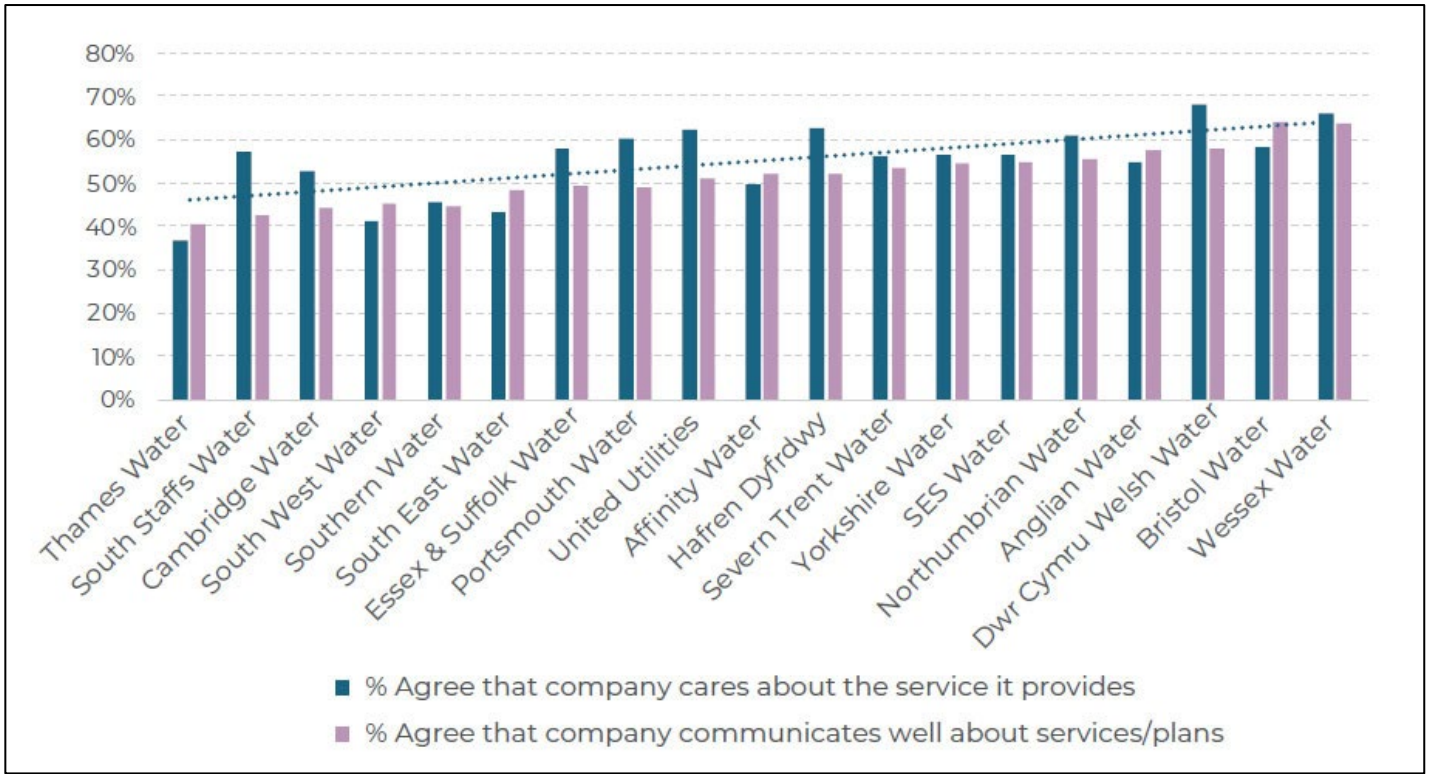
In [last year’s Water Matters](#), we saw that lack of communication from water/sewerage companies was a major source of dissatisfaction with customer service: 61% of dissatisfied customers specifically mentioned lack of communication as a reason for their response.

This year, 42% of those dissatisfied with their company’s customer service gave lack of communication as the reason: a significant drop from last year, but still the most commonly cited cause of dissatisfaction.

As Figure 2 shows, there is a direct correlation between how well customers think their company communicates about its services and plans, and whether or not they feel, more broadly, that their water/sewerage company cares about the service it provides.

It is positive, therefore, that this year we saw a significant rise from last year in the proportion of customers who thought overall their company communicated well about services/plans (up 3% in England and 8% in Wales). However, this still leaves only half of customers overall (51%) thinking their company communicates well – and the trend has remained static since the question was introduced six years ago. There is further room for companies to improve communication around services and future plans, and in doing so also help rebuild wider satisfaction and trust. This includes greater honesty and transparency when communicating and engaging proactively when things go wrong – as set out in our recommendations from [Learning Lessons from the 2024 Price Review](#).

Figure 2: Agreement that your water/sewerage company cares about the service it provides, against agreement that the company communicates well about services/plans (2024)



Conclusion

While some of the questions in Water Matters deal with wider customer perceptions about their company and the water industry as a whole, the company contact findings

discussed in this report are largely focused on those who have recently raised a complaint or query, and so have direct experience on which to draw.

It is welcome that some companies are improving their scores around certain elements of dealing with customer contact – but it is an uneven picture, with significant variation between different companies. At a time when bills are rising, companies need to do more to tell customers how their money is being spent, as well as what additional help is available to them.

As has been seen, customer service is an area that water companies can change – and see significant movement in their Water Matters score – comparatively quickly. There is clearly scope for rapid improvement for some companies, and it is essential that all companies share good practice.

Our forthcoming annual Household Complaints Report will look at these issues in more detail, building on the key work of CCW's complaints assessments which provide insights into the aspects of companies' customer service that need the most improvement.

But these findings are a clear reminder that giving customers the best possible service at all stages of a complaint journey is an important stage in restoring confidence that their company cares about the service it provides, and, in so doing, start to restore trust levels.



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