



CCW

The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Review of household customer complaint handling by water companies in England and Wales

1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025



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Introduction

CCW is the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales.

We help customers who have not been able to resolve a complaint against their water company. We also provide free advice and support. Every year, we help thousands of customers reach a satisfactory conclusion to their complaint, including securing financial redress or changes that lead to an improved service. All of CCW's work is informed by extensive research, which we use to champion the interests of consumers and influence water companies, governments and regulators.

This report looks at complaints made to companies and to CCW and focuses exclusively on the experiences of household customers. Business customer complaints are covered in a separate report. It draws together the intelligence and insight CCW has gathered from the complaints made directly to water companies and those where customers have sought our help to get a resolution. We use this to establish where there might be specific issues at a company or industry level that are impacting customer service and need to be addressed. By identifying the reasons behind customers' dissatisfaction, we can then work with companies to tackle these problems.

The stages of complaints

There are three stages in the water industry complaint procedure. This report references all of them.

Many customers also contact their water company to make an enquiry.

- If these initial queries are answered immediately, they are classed as contacts and not complaints. These contacts are not included in these numbers.
- A complaint is classed as the customer expressing dissatisfaction (rather than just asking a question). A Stage 1 complaint is where the customer has made a complaint and the company has issued its first official response.
- A Stage 2 complaint is one that has not been resolved by the company at the first attempt.
- If a complaint is still not resolved to a customer's satisfaction at Stage 2, they can bring the matter to CCW, for us to review it. When we take on a complaint for a customer, we use a number of different methods to resolve it, including negotiation, mediation and adjudication.

Key findings

Complaints to companies have decreased, but complaints to CCW continue to rise.

The number of complaints water companies received from customers decreased by 8%, down from 222,956 in 2023-24 to 205,853 in 2024-25. However, despite this fall, for the third year in a row, complaints to CCW increased, up 3%, from 7,977 in 2023-24 to 8,235 in 2024-25.

It is perhaps unsurprising that more people sought CCW's independent advice and support, against the backdrop of the biggest water bill increases since privatisation of the sector 36 years ago. But it is also incredibly disappointing. The increase is not as steep as in 2023-24, when complaints to CCW rose by 29%, but any increase, particularly when coupled with a decline in complaint numbers coming into the process, is unacceptable.

CCW visited every water company in England and Wales across 2024-25 to review a selection of complaints from start to finish.

We have used our expertise to help companies understand both the root causes of complaints and how their complaint handling affects customers, asking them to make action plans to address these areas of focus and show us their progress against them. In 2025-26 we will do the same again, but this time we will publish our findings, so that what we uncover - in terms of best practices - is clear for all to learn from, and indicate where their company needs to focus on improving. We hope that openly sharing strengths, areas for focus and progress with companies helps them to rebuild trust in the water industry's customer service.

Increasing charges and affordability concerns underpin the rise in billing complaints.

Billing issues are still the biggest cause for complaint and the volume of these has increased – both in complaints made directly to water companies and those brought to CCW. Affordability concerns rose sharply, up 110% based on the complaints CCW handles. The increase is no surprise; our research looking at conversations in online forums showed high bills have been a growing concern for people, with mentions rising by 229% compared

to the previous survey period¹. Affordability complaints to CCW tend to fall into two groups: complaints from people who cannot afford their bill, and those from customers who may be able to afford the price rises but are angry at the scale of them.

In 2024-25, we saw a 39% increase in people coming to CCW worried about being able to afford their bill. This is a cause of concern for CCW given how essential water is to people's lives. The water industry offers support to people who struggle with their bills, but awareness of that support is relatively low, averaging at 49% but ranging from 38% to 58% in our Water Matters tracking survey². Companies must work to increase people's awareness of the help on offer, so complaints of this nature, and the stress and concern it causes, decline.

Complaints made to CCW about the scale of the bill increases rose even more sharply, up 138% on the previous year. More must be done by water companies to help people feel they receive value for money from the service they pay for, and to explain what, why and where their money is being spent.

Polluting of the environment, and sewage flooding people's homes continued to cause unacceptable distress

We saw a welcome decrease in complaints made to us about

flooding from sewage inside and outside of people's homes. However, where sewer flooding happened, we saw an increase (69%) in complaints about the clean-up assistance offered.

In 2022, as part of CCW's campaign to End Sewer Flooding Misery, we secured commitments from all wastewater companies to improve their support for victims. However, our most recent research on sewer flooding experiences³ shows us companies still have a long way to go to properly support people during and after incidents. We held a workshop with all wastewater companies earlier this year, where companies shared innovations - some successful, some not - in improving people's experiences when they have suffered a flood. Companies also restated their commitments to service levels following floods, as well as having a focus on preventing them from occurring in the first place. It isn't just people being directly affected at home that causes complaints to CCW. Back in our 2023-24 report, we highlighted a staggering 217% increase in general complaints to us about environmental performance – mainly relating to storm overflows and sewage spills into rivers, lakes and the sea.

¹ Understanding consumer priorities 2025 - CCW
² Water Matters 2025 - CCW
³ Customers' experiences of sewer flooding - CCW

Complaints of this nature to CCW decreased by 31% in 2024-25 by comparison, but remain far above their previous levels. This is no surprise when we consider how people feel about their water company's efforts to protect the environment; just 35% of people we surveyed in 2024 were satisfied².

Knowing that people need to see improvements in environmental protection, we asked Ofwat to direct water companies to fix the most harmful storm overflows first, not just tackle the "easy" ones⁴. We repeated this call to action to the Independent Water Commission earlier this year⁵, because we know that people want to see the health of rivers, lakes and bathing waters improve, and focusing on the number of spills alone will not solve the problem.

Smart meters have reduced estimated bill issues, but installations are still a painful experience.

In our previous annual complaints report, we called out the increase in complaints related to metering that CCW had received. With the industry planning large-scale metering programmes across England over the next five years, we said it was important that companies learn from each other's early experiences of rolling out smart meters to make sure that installing and using them is as pain-free as possible for customers.

It is therefore disappointing that we saw an increase in the number of complaints to CCW related to meter installation, up 48% compared to the previous year. Some of the increase might be attributable to the increased number of installations. However, we believe that there is a need for better communication with customers around meter installations, from start to finish. Clear straight forward information needs to be available to help people understand how a meter could benefit them and the environment, allowing them to make informed choices if they are opting for a meter, or to control their bills if they are part of a compulsory metering scheme. When installations happen, field teams need customer-centric training, ensuring they are equipped to answer customer questions and concerns and see customer service as a part of their role. Once a meter has been installed, companies need to make sure customers can understand their bills, understand how they can reduce their usage and therefore cost, and for those who are struggling, how to access support. With improved end-to-end communication, many of these metering complaints could be avoided. We held a workshop with all companies in April 2025, where companies' metering and customer service experts shared their experiences, both good and bad, as well as ways they had worked to improve communications and installations for the benefit of their customers. Over the last year we have given water companies our check list

of things we expect them to be doing when fitting or upgrading meters and encouraged sharing at workshops so all companies can learn from each other's experiences, good and bad. We will continue our focus on making metering a positive experience for customers. Companies must help their customers—whether they're switching to a meter for the first time or upgrading to a smart one — by helping them understand the benefits, how to use the information it provides, and how to access help if they need it.

Positively, we saw complaints to CCW about compulsory metering decline by 27%. We also saw

a 45% decrease in estimated billing complaints and a 9% fall in complaints about how often a meter had been read. This suggests the benefits of smart technology in water meters is starting to tackle this type of complaint. Our research into consumer priorities⁶ showed an increase in conversations about smart meters, with opinions divided between a growing interest and a scepticism of the water-saving technology. However, smart meters can help with much more than just engaging people with their day-to-day water use. The end of estimated bills and the potential for innovative tariffs that give people more control over their bills are, perhaps, undersold benefits.

⁴ CCW's response to Ofwat's 2025-30 draft price determination

⁵ CCW submission to the Independent Water Commission - "measuring and assessing the water environment"

⁶ Understanding consumer priorities 2025 - CCW

Complaints that come to CCW

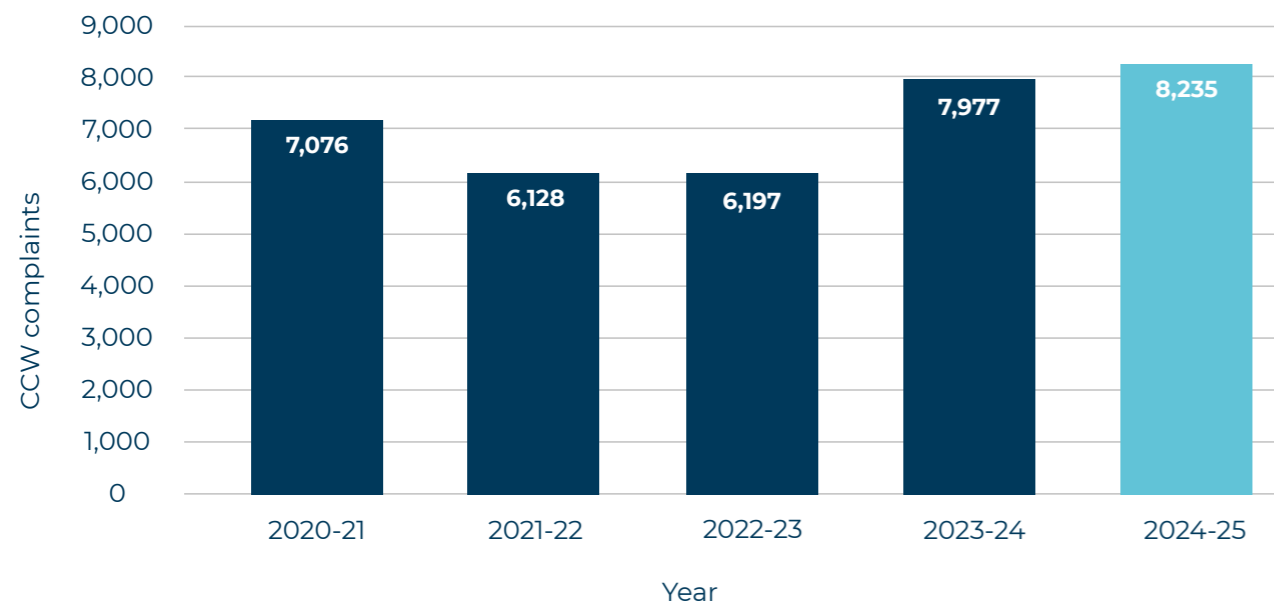
CCW is the water consumer watchdog. After a company has had two chances to resolve a customer's complaint, if they are not satisfied, they are entitled to bring it to us.

CCW can help people with most complaints that they bring to us. We're experts in customer service but there are some issues, like complaints about general water industry performance, that are for regulators like Ofwat or the Environment Agency to look at. When people bring these types of issues to us, we direct them to the right place, but we also keep a record of the contact to help build our evidence base. This in turn informs our research and makes sure we have a clear picture of people's views on the water industry, so we know where to challenge companies to do better.

Complaints coming through to CCW increased by 3% in 2024-25 to 8,235. This is the highest total number since 2015-16.

Whilst the increase is not as big as what we saw in the previous year, it is still discouraging that so many people needed to come to CCW for support in resolving their problem. Our complaint assessments aim to uncover the earliest point where a company could have realised an enquiry was turning into a complaint and solve the problems before they escalate. We hope that in turn, this will reduce the number of people who need our help.

CCW complaints over time



CCW complaint assessments

Complaint assessments are two-day deep dives carried out by a team of CCW consumer experts, including our CCW Executive Team members. We sit with the water companies' complaints teams, randomly select cases from a list of the most recently closed complaints and go through them in detail – revealing and discussing what was done well and what could have been handled better. Some things we uncover are one-off mistakes, but over the two days, some wider learning points usually emerge. Where we see good practice, we encourage companies to share it so the whole industry can improve. We summarise our findings at the end of the two days with the complaints team and their management.

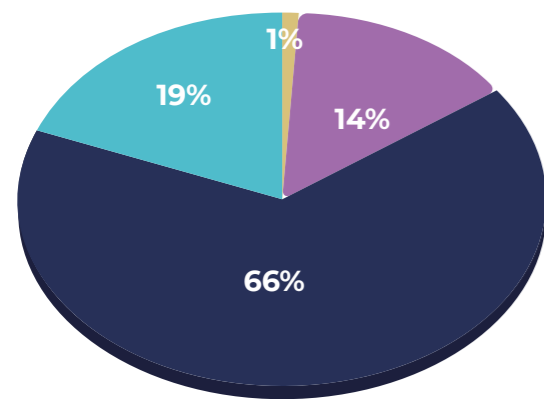
After the assessment, CCW sends the companies a detailed report about what we found. We ask them to build action plans to address the areas that we feel need focus. We check in on the progress against these plans throughout the year. In 2024-25, these reports were kept confidential between the company and CCW, as it was a pilot year where we refined the process as we grew our experience. In 2025-26, we will start publishing high-level reports on our website. We hope that this openness will build accountability and assure customers that companies are not only committed to improving their customer service, but also have areas where they do things really well. In future years, we hope customers will be able to see the progress companies are making in offering excellent customer service when things do go wrong. We believe this transparency can help earn back customers' trust.

Water companies tell us they find these assessments very useful, and we have already seen them lead to changes and improvements to the way complaints are handled.

Types of complaints that come through to CCW

Overall, complaints to CCW increased in 2024-25.

Complaints to CCW by category



■ Billing ■ Sewerage ■ Other ■ Water

To try and stop complaints happening in the first place, in 2023 CCW introduced complaint assessments, and in 2024-25 we held an assessment with every water company in England and Wales. The actions companies take from the insights our assessments uncover should reduce the number of complaints customers make to companies and the number that escalate to CCW.

Complaint categories

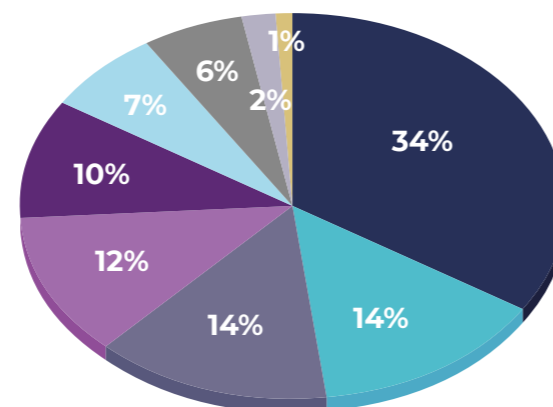
This year we have changed the way we categorise complaints. We now categorise complaints to CCW under billing, water, sewerage and other. The most notable change is that administration complaints are not recorded as a separate category but form a

subset of billing, water or sewerage complaints, depending on which aspect of service they relate to. This means we are not able to directly compare some of the complaint categories. However, within the new categories of billing, water, sewerage and other, we have retained our detailed root causes, so we are able to analyse and compare complaint trends in detail.

Complaints about billing

In 2024-25, the top three causes of billing complaint to CCW have been problems with measured (metered) bills, affordability concerns and administration issues.

Complaints to CCW about billing



■ Measured Billing ■ Affordability ■ Administration
 ■ Unmeasured Billing ■ Debt ■ Payments
 ■ Metering ■ Charges ■ Other billing issues

In our previous year's report, we revealed that complaints relating to all aspects of metering had risen, with disputes about the bill being the biggest driver. For 2024-25, issues with measured bills accounted for just over one in three billing complaints made to CCW and continue to be the biggest cause of customer angst relating to meters.

We warned in our 2023-24 report that with an increase in meters being installed, companies must pool their knowledge and make sure that having a meter fitted is a positive experience for their customers. Therefore it is disappointing to see that complaints about meter installations rose by 48% in 2024-25. We continue to work with companies to encourage this shared learning with a focus on excellent customer experiences.

More positively, we have seen a decline in complaints about estimated bills and meter reading frequency. Smart meters can help remove the need for estimates to be used. Some models allow readings to be collected remotely—either by a company vehicle passing nearby or automatically via an internet connection—sending accurate data straight to the water company.

Accurate bills help people budget, be aware of their water usage, and spot leaks at an early stage. They can also help with the introduction of innovative tariffs, changing the way we pay for water in the future and giving people more control over their bill. Companies must not undermine all of these benefits by making the process of getting a meter fitted painful for people.

We have seen a 110% increase in complaints about affordability issues. This includes complaints from people who cannot afford their bills and from people upset about the increase in prices. These affordability issues now account for 14% of all billing complaints to CCW; in 2023-24 affordability accounted for just 8% of billing complaints.





Case study - 1

Tom wanted a meter fitted so he could reduce his water bills. The company agreed to send a fitter out to see if this was possible, and if so fit one for him.

The meter fitter arrived and confirmed it was possible for Tom to have a water meter at his home. It was to be fitted in a cupboard in his kitchen. The meter fitter proposed a location, Tom asked if it could be the other side of the cupboard, as the proposed position was going to be in the way. But the fitter went ahead and fitted it in the inconvenient place.

When Tom spoke to his company, it said it could send someone out

to do a second survey to see if the meter could be moved, but at a cost of £72. It said if the meter could be moved, it would let him know the cost of the plumbing work, which he would be expected to pay.

Tom came to CCW. We asked the company to show us the notes from the installation. There was no reason given for why the meter could not be fitted where Tom had requested in the first place, so we asked the company to waive the survey fee and move the meter.

Happily, the customer service team saw sense and sent a fitter out to move the meter for free.



There has been a 39% increase in people worried about being able to afford their water bill. We know that the one in five people already struggling to pay their water bill⁷ could rise to two in five people, due to the substantial 2025-30 bill increases⁸. This underlines the importance of the water industry continuing to support those who struggle financially. Our annual tracking survey shows people's awareness of companies offering financial support is increasing, with 49% of people knowing something is offered⁹.

CCW is committed to raising public awareness of affordability support, and the rise in affordability complaints highlights why this is such an important ambition. Sometimes though, affordability complaints are caused by companies not following sensible processes and keeping people informed, as our case study shows.

People's concerns are wider than just the affordability of the bills though. We saw a staggering 138% increase in complaints about price rises; not the affordability of them, but the scale of them. We have seen this sentiment reflected in our Water Matters survey⁹, where just 53% of people felt that their charges were fair.

Only 67% saw their sewerage services as value for money and even fewer - 65% - thought their water service was value for money. As the survey was taken before the bill increases hit people in 2025, it is possible the results would be even worse now. We have said many times before that people need to not just hear what their money is being spent on, but see and feel the difference too. When people see bills increasing but do not see improvements to their services, it inevitably leads to unhappiness and complaints.

Complaints related to administration issues accounted for 14% of billing complaints to CCW in 2024-25. This category includes issues with account information, such as a wrong name

or address, difficulty getting a response from a company and complaints about gestures of goodwill, quality of information and refunds.

Complaints about refunds saw the sharpest increase in this group, up 11% compared to the previous year. More positively, complaints about companies not responding decreased by 56%.



⁷ Cost_of_living_wave_seven.pdf

⁸ Draft determinations research - CCW

⁹ Water-Matters-2025-Data-Report.pdf



Case study - 2

Clara came to CCW to complain that her company had increased her Direct Debit with no notice, and despite her making a complaint, it refused to apologise.

We asked the company to give us its side of the story and show us the correspondence and notes between it and Clara. The company insisted it had apologised, and to say sorry, it had refunded the difference between the new direct debit and the old one.

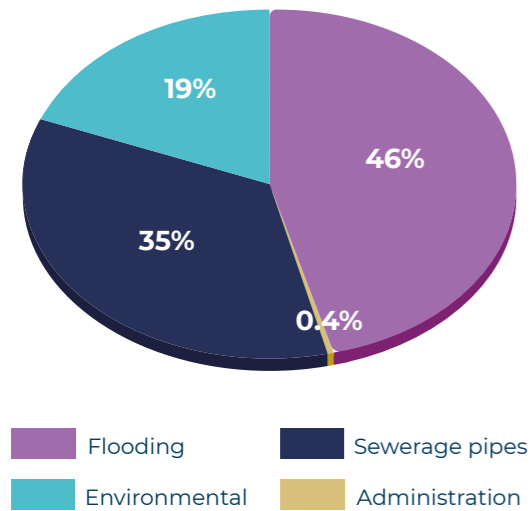
When we looked through the case file it became clear that the company had

apologised to Clara for the fact that she'd had to get in touch, but not for increasing her Direct Debit without notice. We also saw that it hadn't answered Clara's questions about why the company hadn't contacted her before increasing the payment amounts.

Following our mediation, the company apologised properly to Clara and offered a gesture of £50. Clara was happy – all she was looking for was for someone to acknowledge the poor experience and say sorry.

Complaints about sewerage

Complaints to CCW about sewerage



a flood, but that quickly declines, leaving customers feeling let down and, in some cases, traumatised. The impacts are far deeper than just the immediate impact of dirty items in the home or garden, but are emotional, financial and physical, as these quotes show.

We are pleased that Defra has taken forward our recommendation to update the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS), resulting in higher payments being offered to those who experience flooding more than once in a year. We know from our workshops that companies agree that nobody should experience this, but when things do go wrong, people deserve quick responses and appropriate payment

Flooding complaints made up 46% of all sewerage complaints to CCW in 2024-25, consistent with 2023-24. These complaints cover a range of issues including, internal flooding, external flooding, or both occurring together, blocked pipes without flooding, and the clean-up service provided after a flood. While we have seen fewer complaints about flooding in and around the home, and fewer about blocked pipes, there has been a 69% increase in complaints about the clean-up service after a flood. This is the second consecutive year that clean-up complaints have risen —highlighting a growing concern about how companies support customers after flooding incidents.

Seeing the increase in complaints about clean ups after a sewage flood and knowing it is one of the most awful things that can happen to a person in their home, we have revisited our joint research with Ofwat on people's experiences of sewer flooding. Our first survey, in 2022¹⁰, brought to life just how distressing this type of experience is. Our new research¹¹, conducted in spring and summer 2024, showed some improvement in initial experience with a company following

Customer experiences

"It will be £15,000 for kitchen repairs; all plasterboard in the kitchen will need to be replaced, all kickboards, all skirting boards damaged by mould."

"In the grand scheme, it's caused a hell of a lot of anxiety, I've had complete breakdowns. It's destroyed me as a person... My entire life has been destroyed - you just watch the water come in slowly and can't do anything."

"We have now lost our home insurance due to the number of claims that we have made for flooding damage (we lost the ability to claim accidental damage the year before for the same reason) yet we are STILL being flooded."

"This is the roof over my kids' head. I'm still on some calming tablet to this day because I just can't deal with it ... Mentally, this has nearly broken me and my family ... I just want out. I just I need to move on with my life."

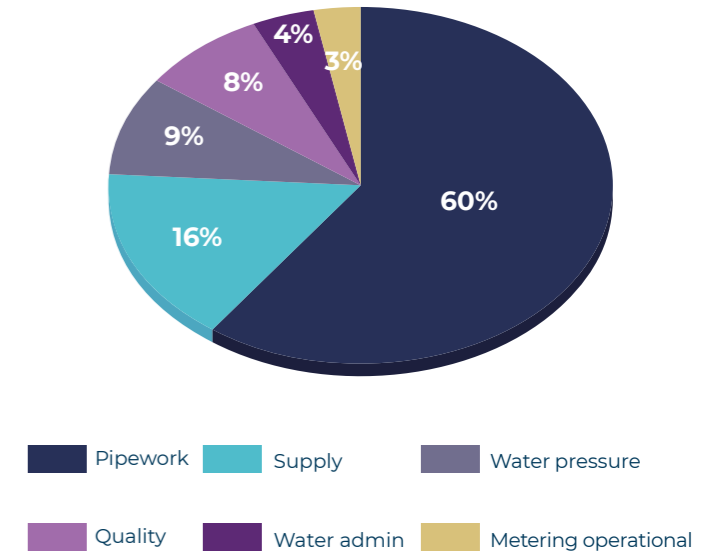
for the service failure. We are also pleased to see that the definition of internal flooding has been extended to include domestic buildings such as garden offices and detached garages.

Complaints about sewerage pipes accounted for just over a third of all sewerage complaints to CCW in 2024-25. This category covers root causes such as who owns the pipe, who should pay for repairs, how much those repairs cost and issues with requisitioning new sewers or connections. Whilst the proportion of pipe complaints increased (it was 31% of all sewerage complaints in the previous year), the individual root causes did not see much movement.

Environmental complaints about wastewater declined, making up 19% of complaints to CCW compared to 23% in the previous year. The category captures complaints about odour issues, both from drains and from sewage treatment works, and environmental nuisance issues, as well as environmental pollution complaints. The shrinking proportion of environmental complaints was down to a 31% decrease in people coming to CCW to complain about environmental pollution issues, such as those impacting bathing water and rivers. Despite the decline in pollution complaints, we still received far more contact from people about environmental problems than we did two years ago. Sewerage companies have all made commitments to end illegal sewage discharges and all companies committed to better protection of the environment in their business plans for 2025-2030. We tested how people felt about all aspects of these plans¹²; 75% of people agreed the plans were acceptable, explaining they thought they focused on the right things, and had a view to the long term.

When reminded of the impact on customers' bills, this acceptance dropped to 58%. The delivery of these commitments is critical: customers must see the impact of companies' plans to be convinced they are working to look after the environment amongst other priorities.

Complaints to CCW about water



Complaints about pipework – including who owns it, the cost or time to fix it, and the damage leaks from pipework cause – accounted for 60% of the water complaints CCW received in 2024-25. Within this group, the biggest root cause of complaint was delays in repairs, making up 32% of water pipework complaints. With people becoming increasingly aware of how water stressed parts of our country are - and making a more conscious effort to use water wisely and fix leaks in their home - it is unsurprising that seeing companies take time over repairing leaks is a frequent cause of frustration.

Water supply was the second largest category of complaint. This group encompasses problems such as water supply interruptions, usage restrictions (such as when a company asks households to boil their water before drinking it) and problems around new water connections. The largest overall root cause was companies failing to restore water supplies when they said they would. Our research into incidents tells us how important clear and accurate communication is when things go wrong. If the water needs to be turned off for any reason, such as needing to repair a burst, it is really important that companies empower customers to make sensible choices by giving accurate estimates as to when things will return to normal, and if they do not know, saying so and telling people when the next update will be.

¹⁰ Customer experiences of sewer flooding - CCW

¹¹ Sewer-flooding-experiences-wave-two-research.pptx

¹² Draft determinations research - CCW

The Alternative Dispute Resolution process

CCW runs the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process for the water industry. Prior to December 2023, it was operated by WATRS, a third-party adjudication scheme. Bringing the ADR scheme into CCW's control has had multiple benefits:

- It has made the process quicker and easier for customers, as CCW continues to handle their case. Under the previous scheme, customers had to make an application to WATRS and retell their entire complaint history.
- It allows CCW to support customers through the process. Previously, CCW had no involvement with a case once it went to WATRS, so customers were left on their own to rebut any defence given by the company, leading to an imbalance of power.
- It gives CCW greater insight into the types of cases that progress to ADR, and allows us to share lessons with industry on actions that can be taken to resolve problems sooner for customers.
- It has given CCW case handlers a better understanding of the process, meaning they are able to give customers tailored advice on the best way to progress their case and the kind of outcome they might expect.

The ADR process consists of two parts: mediation and adjudication. When a complaint cannot be resolved through CCW's normal negotiation process, our caseworker will talk to the customer about the options of mediation and adjudication. Where appropriate, the case will be transferred to our specialist ADR team. A member of this team will then call the customer to talk through their case in detail, looking at the

options available to them, evidence to support a successful case and likely outcomes. At this point customers are able to make an informed decision as to whether they want to progress their case, and if so whether mediation or adjudication is the most appropriate route. Our specialists will support customers if they choose to progress. Mediation tends to be quicker and works well for less complex cases, adjudication can take up to 35 working days but is more appropriate for complex issues.

In the 12 months of operation across 2024-25 only 283 customers needed to access our ADR process; just 3% of the total complaints CCW received in the year. Of those, our specialist team recommended 66 of them for mediation. However, the company and the customer agreed to this in only 37 of those cases. Clearly, for mediation to work, both parties need to be willing to meet. Of the 37 cases that went through mediation the success rate is high; 28 cases, 76%, saw an improved outcome that satisfied the customer.

One hundred and forty-two cases went to adjudication, but there the success rate was considerably lower than at mediation; just two cases were found in the customer's favour. A further 16 cases had a split decision, where the adjudicator did not give the customer everything they asked for, but the outcome was improved in some way for them. This means that 13% of the adjudications were in some way successful for customers. Mediation is the more successful route in improving customer outcomes. It is likely that had these cases gone through adjudication they would have been upheld in the customer's favour or received a split decision, but mediation is quicker and

more straightforward, so a better experience for customers. Looking at the types of complaint that progress to adjudication, billing complaints

form the majority of cases, but sewerage complaints have the most success.

Caring for customers in vulnerable circumstances

One of the insights from taking on the ADR process is that we see customers in vulnerable circumstances accessing ADR in disproportionate numbers. Under 2% of complaints to CCW in 2024-25 came from people in vulnerable circumstances but they account for about a third of all customers who enter into the ADR process.

In response to this, from April 2025 we have opened our Extra Support Team, focused solely on assisting people in vulnerable circumstances. Our caseworkers in this team are specially trained to help people in a way that works for them, and work directly with a wide range of organisations to provide holistic support. We have already seen an increase in the number of people in vulnerable circumstances we are able to assist through

our Extra Support Team, with 4.6% of complaints received by CCW in Q1 2025-26 coming from this group of people. Our Extra Support Team has delivered some truly fantastic outcomes already, like the case of Mr K, which our Extra Support Team Advisor, Mary, talks through on [LinkedIn](#). These successes have been driven by the invaluable time spent working closely with our customers, supporting them through the process.



Case study - 3

Musa discovered a leak on his supply pipe. He tried a drain contractor that he had cover with, but as it was going to take some time before they could visit him, he gave his water company a call. The company said rather than wait for the drain people, to go ahead and get a plumber to fix the leak and the company would reimburse him the cost. Musa got the leak fixed and sent the invoice for £1,500 to his company. It then refused to pay him as the leak was on his pipework, not the company's. To Musa's horror, he was also told that he wouldn't get any allowance off his metered bill for the water lost for the same reason.

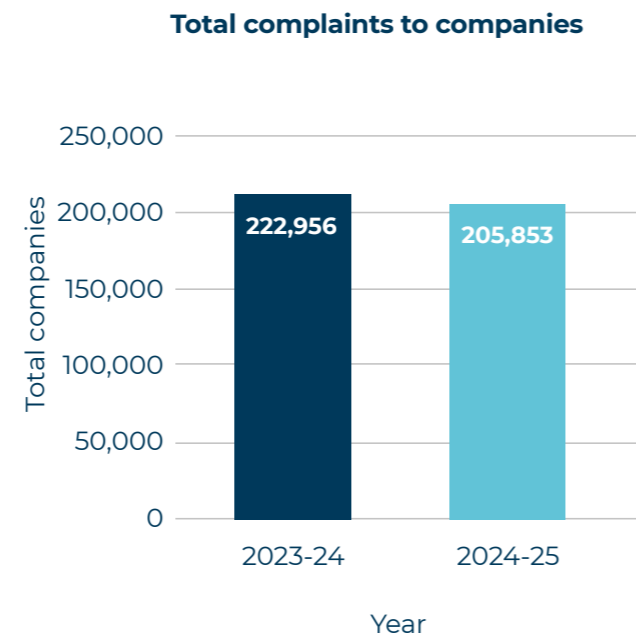
Despite explaining that he'd only employed the plumber because the company said it would cover the costs, Musa got nowhere. He brought his case to CCW. From the information provided by Musa and the company, we could see he had been misinformed. Under normal circumstances, a leak on private

pipework is for the homeowner to fix, and leak allowances, covering the cost of the water lost to the leak, are not always due. In this case it was clear that the company was wrong when it said it would reimburse the plumber's cost, but nevertheless it had said it. We recommended the company pay half the plumber's costs and provide a full leakage allowance on Musa's bill for the water lost to the leak. The company refused.

After talking through the options with his CCW case handler, Musa agreed with our recommendation that the case should go to mediation. Our specialist ADR team took up the case and, after looking through all the evidence decided that the outcome CCW had recommended was the right one. Through the mediation process, the company agreed to reimburse Musa half of the plumber's costs and to give a leakage allowance on the measured bill to clear the excessive cost the lost water had created.

Complaints from customers to water companies

Customers across England and Wales made fewer complaints to water companies in 2024-25 than in the previous year. The 8% decrease saw complaint numbers drop from 222,956 in 2023-24 to 205,853 in 2024-25.

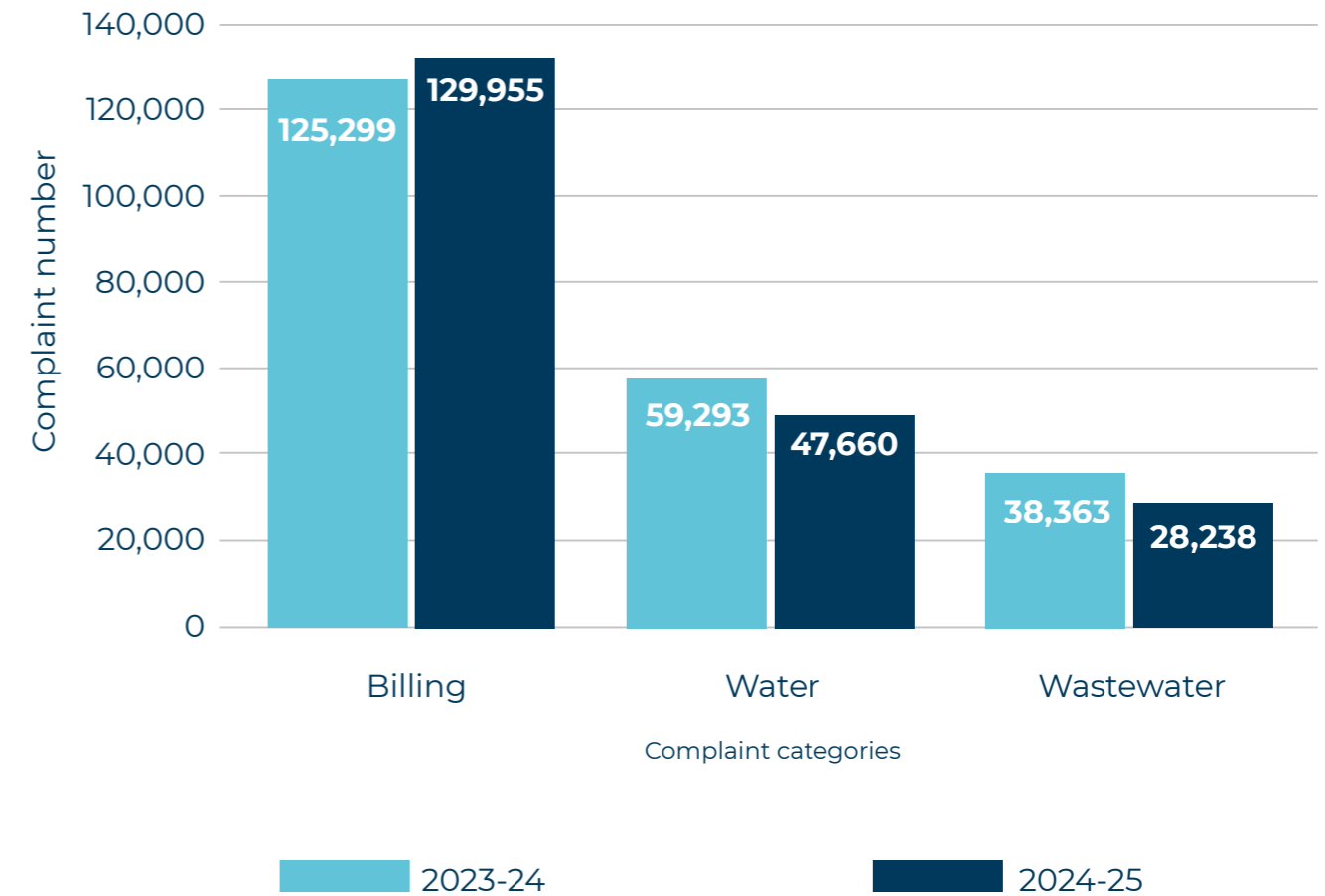


Companies record complaints in three broad categories - billing issues, water issues and wastewater (sewerage) issues. Every year, billing issues make up the largest category of complaint, and 2024-25 was no exception.

Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, we have seen the proportion of billing complaints grow, and the proportion of water and wastewater complaints decline.

¹³ Paying Fair Guidelines - Ofwat

Total complaints to companies by category

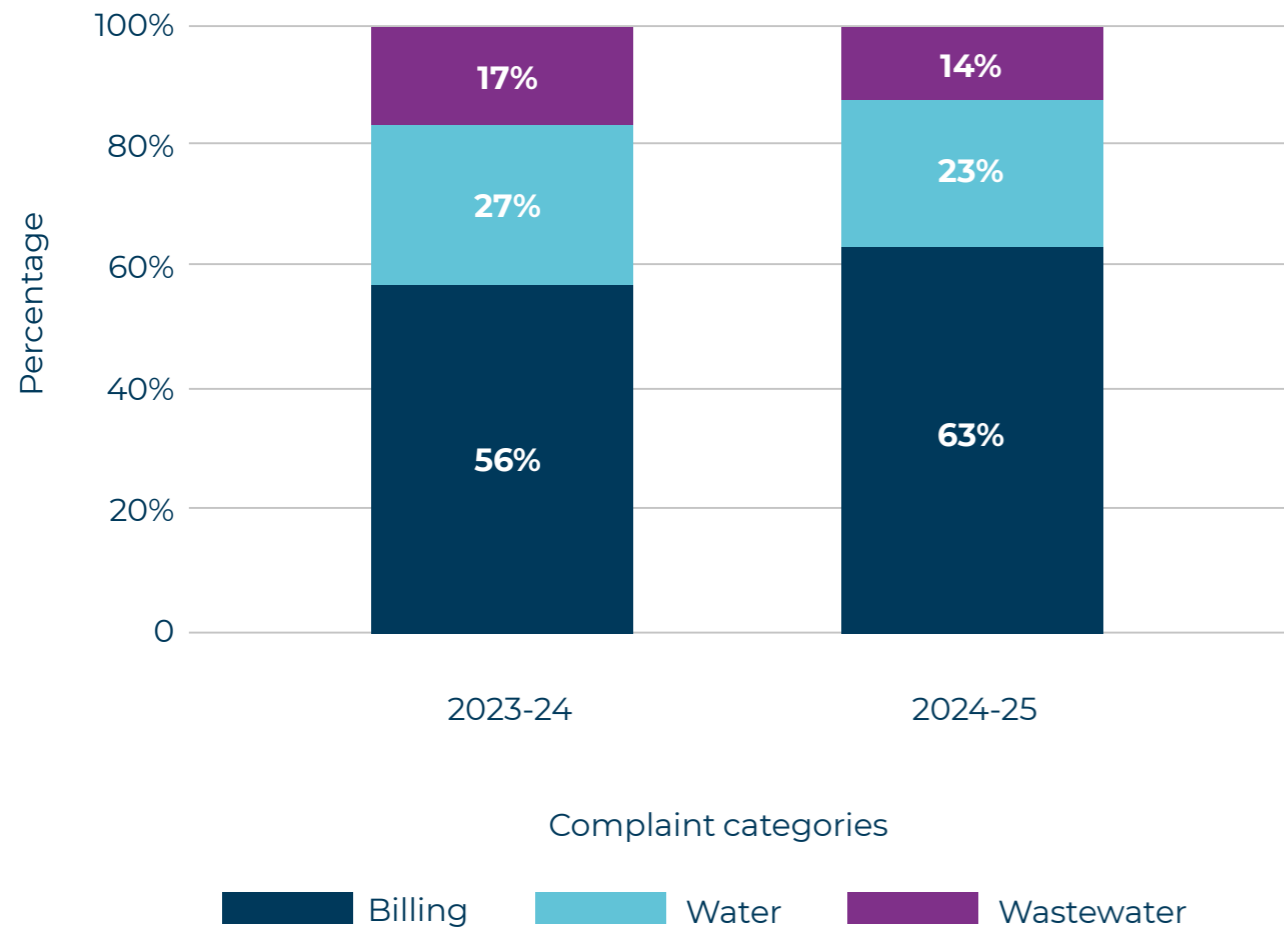


Complaints about bills – queries about the amount, affordability, payments and how to pay – make up 63% of all complaints, up 7 percentage points since last year. Customers were hit with steep bill rises in April 2025, so we expect to see complaints about bills increase even further in 2025-26. We think some disputes about bills could be avoided by better communication from companies, helping people to understand what their money goes towards, and making sure they are aware of the help and support available to them if they do start to struggle. We have introduced debt assessments, looking at

how companies approach their customers who are building up arrears. These look for good practice as well as areas that need focus, making sure processes are in line with Ofwat's Paying Fair guidance¹³.

Complaints about water services (leakage, low pressure, no water supply) dropped in proportion by just over 3% in 2024-25 (although due to rounding it shows as 4% on the chart below) but still made up the second largest group of complaints, accounting for nearly one in four disputes. Complaints about wastewater (sewerage service) have shrunk in proportion by 3%.

Change in complaints category proportions

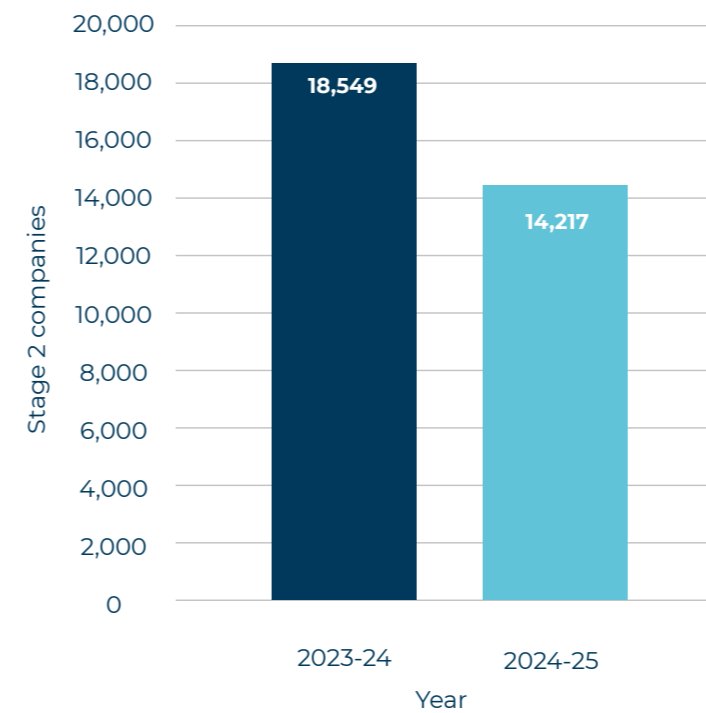


Stage 2 complaints to water companies

The total number of Stage 2 complaints to all water companies in 2024-25 dropped by 23% compared to 2023-24.

It is positive to see these complaints drop further than initial complaints, showing us that not only did fewer customers need to complain in the first place, but of those that did, more saw the matter resolved at the first attempt.

Stage 2 complaints to companies



Individual company performance

CCW examines the performance of individual water companies by comparing them with others that provide the same main services; i.e. we compare water and sewerage companies and water only companies separately. We also consider the number of complaints made per 10,000 connections (properties served).

This means that the size of the company is taken into account when we make comparisons about performance. The number of properties each company serves varies quite widely, so looking at the number of complaints they get per 10,000 connections ensures we are making like for like comparisons, not unfairly penalising larger or very small companies by using a pure complaint volume figure.

We report on companies that provide both a water and a sewerage service (water and sewerage companies, WaSCs) separately to companies that only provide water services (water only companies, WOCs). Whilst reporting complaints by 10,000 customers served takes into account the difference in size of the company, companies that are WaSCs receive more customer contacts than WOCs (that provide only one service) because of the nature of providing two services.

Our comparison takes into account two distinct metrics for performance; the total complaints received by companies from customers and our complaint handling metric. The complaint handling metric provides a more holistic picture of how well companies are dealing with complaints. It uses a combination of the number of Stage 2 complaints a company receives – an indicator that complaints are not resolved to the customer’s satisfaction by companies - and the number of complaints customers bring to CCW for resolution. Individual complaint handling calculations and the methodology for companies is shown in Appendix 1b.

This section provides additional commentary on the performance of companies that demonstrated better than average performance in both metrics or worse than average performance in both metrics. It is possible for companies to have high levels of complaints, while also being good at handling them, or a low level of complaints and be poor at handling them. Customers don’t want to complain, so the ideal is for companies to not generate complaints, but if they do, they should handle them well.

Of the water and sewerage companies, Thames Water and Yorkshire Water had

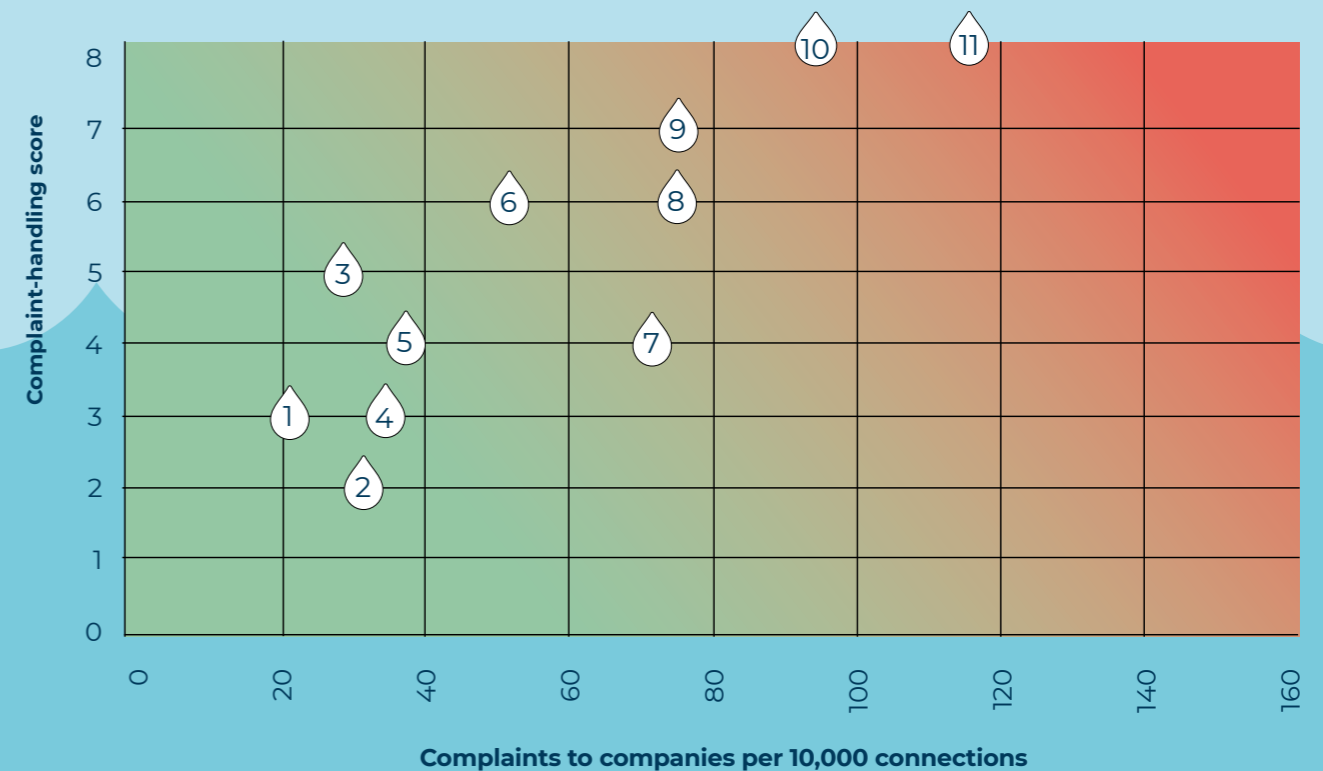
Water and sewerage companies (WaSCs) – overall complaint performance 2024-25

Company	Complaints to WaSCs per 10,000 connections ¹⁴	Complaint handling	
Anglian Water	38.0	Better than average	Better than average
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water	52.0	Worse than average	Worse than average
Hafren Dyfrdwy	20.7	Better than average	Better than average
Northumbrian Water	32.0	Better than average	Better than average
Severn Trent Water	27.5	Worse than average	Worse than average
South West Water	72.696 ¹⁵	Poor	Poor
Southern Water	68.8	Better than average	Better than average
Thames Water	115.2	Poor	Poor
United Utilities	72.692 ¹⁵	Worse than average	Worse than average
Wessex Water	31.2	Good	Good
Yorkshire Water	94.8	Poor	Poor

¹⁴ See Appendix 1a for details of how the complaints metric is calculated. A lower score shows better performance.

¹⁵ South West Water and United Utilities have very similar complaint numbers but actually straddle the boundary between being a worse than average performer and a poor performer. At one decimal place this difference would not be clear, hence we have stated these figures to three decimal places.

Complaints to companies vs complaint handling – (WaSCs)



- 1. Hafren Dyfrdwy
- 2. Wessex Water
- 3. Severn Trent
- 4. Northumbrian Water
- 5. Anglian Water
- 6. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
- 7. Southern Water
- 8. United Utilities
- 9. South West Water
- 10. Yorkshire Water
- 11. Thames Water

the largest number of complaints per household served that came through to CCW. This, combined with their high Stage 2 complaints, meant they were both poor performers in our complaint-handling metric, as well as being the companies that received the most complaints directly from their customers per 10,000 connections. South West Water also compared poorly to other WaSCs in the volume of complaints it received directly, the number of Stage 2 escalations and volume of complaints that escalated to CCW, making it the third company to score badly in both of our measures.

Northumbrian Water and Wessex Water both had the fewest number of complaints escalated to CCW. Hafren Dyfrdwy received the fewest complaints per 10,000 connections directly from its customers, with Severn Trent Water not far behind. Southern Water had the lowest number of Stage 2 escalations, followed closely by Hafren Dyfrdwy and Wessex Water. However, of all the water and sewerage companies, it is only Wessex Water that has scored well in both metrics.

In last year's report we commented that we hoped to see complaint numbers to Thames Water fall in 2024-25 and that early signs were promising. Positively, the company has made a big improvement in this area, with just over 115 of every 10,000 Thames Water customers having needed to make a complaint to it in 2024-25, compared to 139 customers in 2023-24. However, the water and sewerage company average is 67 complaints per 10,000 customers served, so there is clearly a lot more work to do. The same is true of Thames Water's Stage 2 escalations and complaints to CCW. Improvements have been made but there is a long way

to go before it could even be considered an average performer. Nevertheless, we are heartened to see the improvements, meaning Thames Water customers are seeing the green shoots of better customer experiences. We hope to see a continuing decline in complaint numbers across 2025-26.

The comparatively high number of complaints Yorkshire Water received from its customers, which marginally decreased compared to the previous year, combined with the proportion that escalated to stage 2 and to CCW, have made Yorkshire Water a poor performer for the second year in a row. The company realised that it was inadvertently pushing its customers to CCW before approaching it directly, and corrected this in late 2024. Since taking this action, there has been a decline in the number of customers coming to CCW for help with their issue. Yorkshire Water continues to review its customer complaint processes and we hope that those changes will in turn see more complaints resolved at the first stage of the process, so reducing the number of stage 2 complaints, and further decreasing the number of customers who come to CCW. Whilst things may go wrong, putting a matter right first time can leave a customer with a positive impression of a company, and we would like to see this for Yorkshire Water customers. We have recently undertaken a complaint assessment with Yorkshire Water and look forward to seeing it turn the insights into action.

South West Water received fewer complaints from its customers in 2024-25 than in the previous year, but as other companies saw a greater decline in complaints, it has moved into the poor

performers band. Looking at the complaint-handling metric, South West Water saw more stage 2 escalations and generated more complaints to CCW in 2024-25 than the previous year, so has moved into the poor performer band. In line with the industry trend, the company received fewer water and wastewater complaints, but dealt with more issues related to billing. The company is committed to improving the service it offers to customers, and was one of the first companies we undertook a complaints assessment with this year to help it identify areas to focus on as well as identify good practice. As with the previous year, Wessex Water was the only water and sewerage

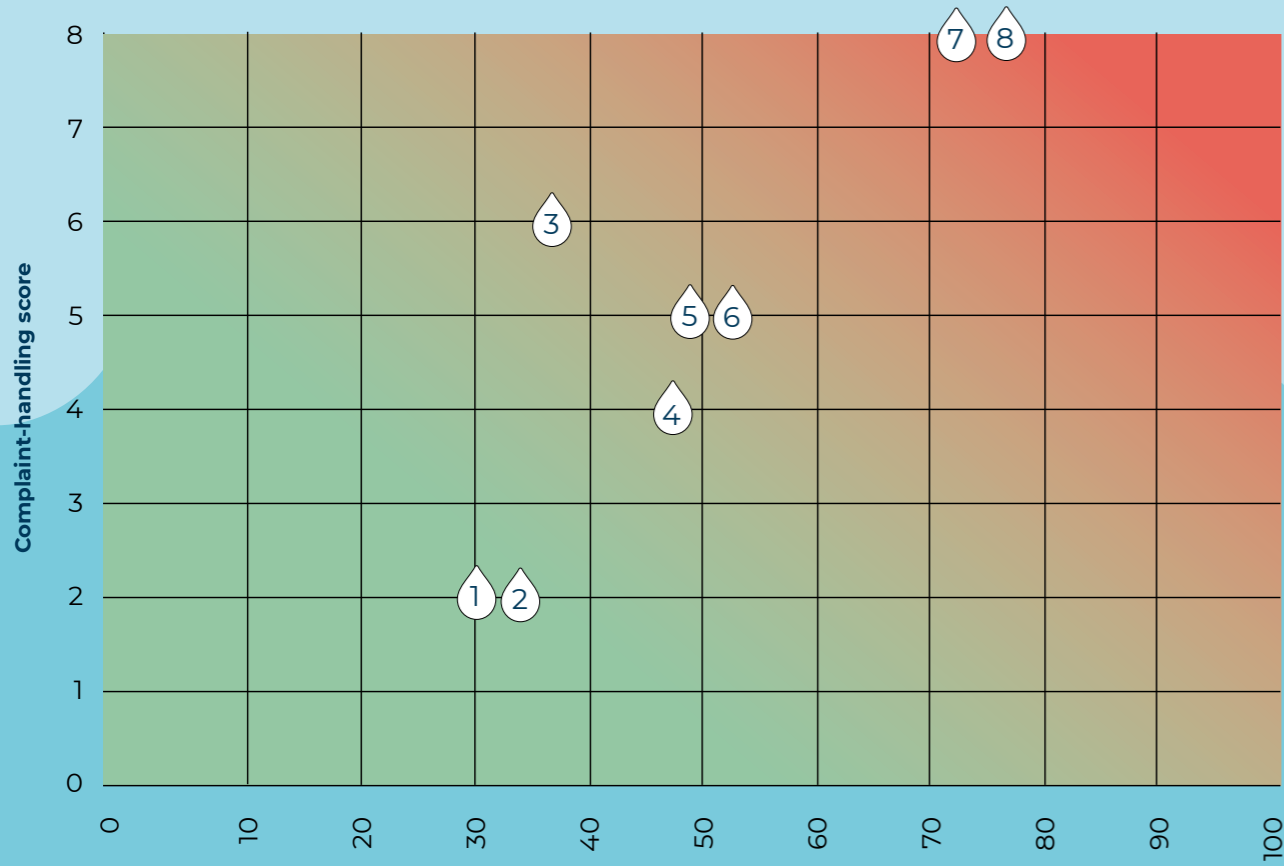
company to achieve a green rating in both of CCW's metrics. Two other WaSCs, Hafren Dyfrdwy and Severn Trent Water, received a lower number of complaints directly from their customers. However the proportion of these complaints that escalated to Stage 2 and to CCW means they did not achieve green in both measures. Wessex Water consistently ranks amongst the best performers and we know other companies have visited the company to learn from its strong track record. Sharing things that work is a great way to help the entire industry improve, for the benefit of everyone in England and Wales, and a culture CCW strongly encourages and supports.

Water only companies – overall complaint performance 2024-25

Company	Complaints to WOCs per 10,000 connections ¹⁶	Complaint handling	
Affinity Water	71.9	Poor	Good
Bristol Water	32.8	Good	Better than average
Cambridge Water	50.9	Worse than average	Worse than average
Essex & Suffolk Water	49.1	Worse than average	Poor
Portsmouth Water	29.7	Good	
SES Water	75.7	Poor	
South East Water	47.2	Better than average	
South Staffs Water	36.1	Worse than average	

¹⁶ See Appendix 1a for details of how the complaints metric is calculated. A lower score shows better performance.

Complaints to companies vs complaint handling – (WOCs)



Complaints to companies per 10,000 connections

- | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Portsmouth Water | 3. South Staffs Water | 5. Essex & Suffolk Water | 7. Affinity Water |
| 2. Bristol Water | 4. South East Water | 6. Cambridge Water | 8. SES Water |

Of the companies that provide water only services, SES Water received the highest number of complaints per household served in 2024-25. It also found itself in a worse position when compared to 2023-24. It had the highest number of escalated Stage 2 complaints, at 6.1 per 10,000 properties served, of any water only company (the next highest being Affinity Water at 2.2). Added to this, SES Water customers came to CCW more frequently than any other water only company,

creating 5.2 complaints per 10,000 households served. We know the company went through large changes across the year and this may have contributed to the worsening of its position, but there can be no excuse; SES Water customers deserve better and we expect to see the company acting quickly to improve its complaint and escalation levels.

The second water only company to perform poorly in both of our measures was Affinity Water. The company saw a slight



increase in the number of complaints its customers made to it directly, from 68.2 to 71.9 per 10,000 households served. It saw a significant increase in escalated Stage 2 complaints, growing 623%, from 47 in 2023-24 to 340 in 2024-25. Having been an 'above average' performer for the complaint-handling measure in 2023-24, Affinity Water is now ranked as 'poor'. However, the company dealt with a number of challenges such as rectifying technology issues which created high volume of estimated bills being dispatched, implementation of the TransUnion credit registration process for unpaid bills and technology system issues requiring attention. We were encouraged that the company did not shy away from addressing this head on, proactively contacting affected customers, accepting the dissatisfaction caused and wanting to resolve the matter in a straightforward and simple way for its customers. We anticipate that performance will recover based on the actions undertaken and implemented.

For the second year running, Portsmouth Water was the best performing water only company. It received the lowest number of complaints from its customers at 29.7 complaints per 10,000 households served. It also saw a low number of

escalated Stage 2 complaints, and just 0.4 complaints per 10,000 households served came to CCW. Portsmouth Water introduced a new billing system in 2024-25, an operation that CCW has previously seen cause a spike in complaints at other companies. But Portsmouth Water has managed this whilst retaining its best performer position. This shows that a transition can be achieved with minimal customer impact, and we encourage Portsmouth Water to share the lessons from its experience with other companies for the benefit of all customers in future.

The final company deserving of praise is Bristol Water. In 2023-24 it received the lowest number of complaints from its customers and in 2024-25 it has finished a close second, so has performed consistently well. The company improved its escalated Stage 2 complaint numbers, generating the lowest number of any WOC in 2024-25, at just 1.1 per 10,000 households served. It also saw fewer escalations to CCW in 2024-25 compared to 2023-24, generating 0.7 complaints per 10,000 households served, a close second to Portsmouth Water. Previously ranked as 'better than average' for complaint handling, these improvements combined mean Bristol Water is ranked as 'good' for both categories in 2024-25.

Appendix 1a: Our methodology

Normalising complaints

To allow us to compare companies of different sizes, our complaint metrics factor in the number of water and wastewater connections served by each company. The metric we use to do this is 'complaints per 10,000 connections'. For example:

Company A

Total complaints	600
Total connections	4,000,000
Total complaints per 10,000 connections	$= 600/4,000,000 \times 10,000 = 1.5$

Comparative Performance

Where we compare the performance of individual companies we do so within their respective segments as either Water and Sewerage Companies (WaSCs) or Water Only Companies (WOCs).

Our metrics

We assess company complaint performance based upon two metrics designed to reflect the underlying service provided to customers and the ability of companies to resolve customer complaints first time.

Volume of complaints

We use total complaints (per 10,000 connections) to reflect the underpinning service.

This is assessed based on quartiles where quartile 1 is the best performing quartile. The colour coding is as follows:

Table A1

Quartile	Total complaint rank
1	Better performance
2	Better than the median
3	Poorer than the median
4	Poorer performance

Complaint-handling score

The complaint-handling metric is a composite of the percentage of escalated Stage 2 complaints (compared to total complaints) received by companies and complaints made about companies to CCW per 10,000 connections. Both components are based on the quartile performance within WaSC and WOC bandings where Quartile 1 is the best performing quartile. Each quartile is then scored as follows.

Quartile 1: 1

Quartile 2: 2

Quartile 3: 3

Quartile 4: 4

The respective scores for Stage 2 complaints and complaints made about companies to CCW for each company are then added together to determine their respective complaint-handling score. Each company is then assigned an overall complaint-handling ranking in accordance with the following criteria:

Table A2

Total score	Complaint-handling rank
2	Good
3-4	Above average
5-6	Below average
7-8	Poor



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