



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Household complaints report 2025-26

Review of complaints made by household
water consumers in England and Wales
between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026



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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 by household customers directly to water companies and those made to CCW. Business customer complaints are covered in a separate report¹. This report 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 report to highlight 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.

A complaint is defined as a customer expressing dissatisfaction (rather than just asking a question).

Stage 1 complaint

A stage 1 complaint is where a customer has made a complaint and the company has issued its first official response.



Stage 2 complaint

A stage 2 complaint is one that has not been resolved by the company at the first attempt.



CCW review

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 and, where we feel the outcome is not appropriate, challenge the company through negotiation and mediation to do better.

¹[Business Customer Complaints 2025-26 - CCW](#)

Key figures 1/2

Against a backdrop
of unprecedented
bill increases

26%

industry average
bill increase²

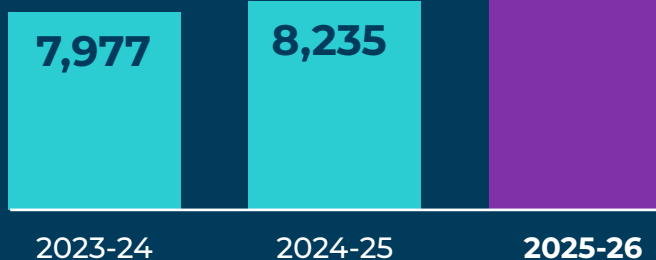


²Annual average bill changes
2025 -2026 | Water UK

Total complaints made
to CCW in 2025-26

15,115

up from 8,235
in 2024-25



84%

increase in
complaints
to CCW

97%

rise in billing complaints to CCW
compared to the previous year,
from 5,445 to 10,735

Top 3 root causes:

Measured
billing



+121%

4,116 complaints

Affordability



+74%

1,368 complaints

Billing admin



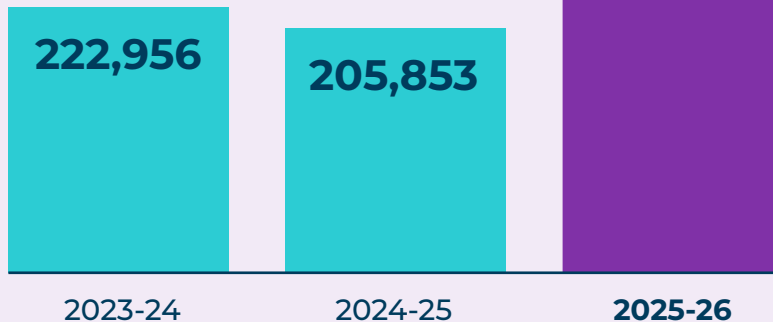
+72%

1,311 complaints

Key figures 2/2

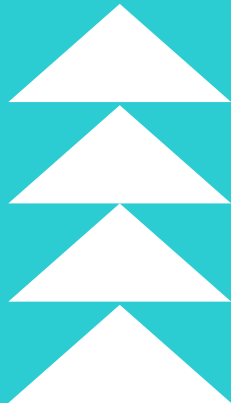
321,347

Total complaints made to companies in 2025-26 up from 205,853 in 2024-25



56%

increase in complaints to companies



72%

increase in billing complaints to companies

compared to the previous year, from 129,955 to 223,179

26%

increase in stage 2 complaints to companies

up from 14,217 in 2024-25 to 17,929 in 2025-26





2

Household complaints that come to CCW

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Overview

CCW can help people with most complaints that they haven't been able to resolve. 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. Sometimes customers come to us for advice before contacting their company, or once they have received an initial response. We will always offer advice but do not become actively involved in complaints before the company process has been followed. We keep a record of these complaint subjects though, again, to help inform our understanding of customer concerns.

This evidence informs our research and helps ensure we have a clear picture of people's views on the water industry, enabling us to challenge companies to do better where necessary.

CCW received 15,115 household complaints in 2025-26, up 84% from 8,235 the previous year. The sheer scale of this increase in complaints is unprecedented in CCW's 20-year history. It is also a steeper rise than the 56% increase in complaints made directly to companies, suggesting more people who experienced an issue also sought independent advice on their complaint than in previous years.

The increase in complaints to CCW was seen across customers of all companies. The range was wide, from a 23% increase for SES Water to a 255% increase for Portsmouth Water (albeit Portsmouth Water's increase was from a small base, rising from 11 complaints in 2024-25 to 39 in 2025-26; Portsmouth Water remains one of the best performing companies).

The increase in complaints to CCW should be considered alongside evidence from our complaint assessments³. These assessments throughout

2025-26 have identified examples of strong call handling, empathetic staff dealing with complex problems, and written responses that were customer-friendly and clear. They also identified areas for improvement, including dedicated support for customers in vulnerable circumstances and clear communication about next steps, timescales and expected outcomes. This points to an important distinction. The rise in complaints to CCW does not necessarily indicate poor complaint handling. Rather, it suggests that good practice is not yet applied consistently enough to prevent customers from escalating issues or seeking CCW's independent view on whether a resolution is appropriate.

For customers, the difference between a complaint being resolved and a complaint being prolonged, often lies in whether the company listens, explains

³[Review of CCW's company assessments - 2025-26 - CCW](#)

clearly, sets realistic expectations and follows through on what it has promised. Consistent delivery of these fundamentals across all customer interactions will be critical in preventing issues escalating and rebuilding customer trust.



Household complaints report 2025-26

CCW assessments

CCW redesigned its complaint assessments in 2024-25, shifting the focus from compliance with processes to company culture, with greater emphasis on customer-centred outcomes and overall customer experience.

We spend two days in-person with companies. We randomly select complaint cases from a recent period and review them from start to finish with company personnel. We assess:

► Process

How the company follows its published processes and the household complaints guidance

► Culture

How the company's culture is reflected in the service provided to customers

We give feedback in person at the end of the two-day assessment and in a detailed report sent to each company two weeks later. We ask them to build action plans to address the areas identified for improvement. We check in on the progress against these plans throughout the year.

In 2025-26, CCW published our complaint assessment findings for every company, identifying four areas of good practice and four areas for improvement for each, available to read here: [Complaint and Debt assessments of water companies 2025-26 - CCW](#).

We have been encouraged by companies' continued engagement with the assessment process. We have seen commitment to maintaining areas of good practice, willingness to share experience with other companies and enthusiasm for improving areas identified as needing focus.

The success of the complaint assessment programme has led CCW to expand our approach. We have now introduced similar assessments of companies' debt journeys and developed an assessment framework for incident management, which was piloted during 2025-26. In 2026-27, we will also pilot vulnerability assessments to help identify how companies can better support customers who need additional assistance

Types of complaint that come to CCW

High level complaint categories

CCW captures complaints in the same broad categories that water companies report on: billing complaints, water complaints and wastewater complaints.

Complaint categories to CCW⁴

In 2025-26, billing accounted for 71% of the complaints CCW received. This is an increase from 66% of total complaints that they accounted for in 2024-25. Complaints about water made up 20% of complaints to CCW, compared to 19% in 2024-25. The proportion of complaints about wastewater that CCW received in 2025-26 decreased, down from 14% in 2024-25 to 8%. Complaints about other issues remained at 1%.

These headline categories provide an overview of the issues customers brought to CCW in 2025-26. The following sections explore each category in more detail, helping us understand the issues that are causing the greatest frustration for customers.

As well as identifying the issues causing distress for customers, breaking complaints into subgroups and root causes helps CCW spot trends over time. This insight informs not only individual company conversations but also CCW's research, policy development and wider work in challenging the industry to improve.

⁴CCW changed the categories that we record complaints under in 2024-25, to mirror the three categories that water companies capture; billing, water and wastewater. We retained "other" to capture complaints that are outside of a company function, such as GDPR or non-regulatory issues.

Figure 1 Household complaints to CCW by category in 2025-26

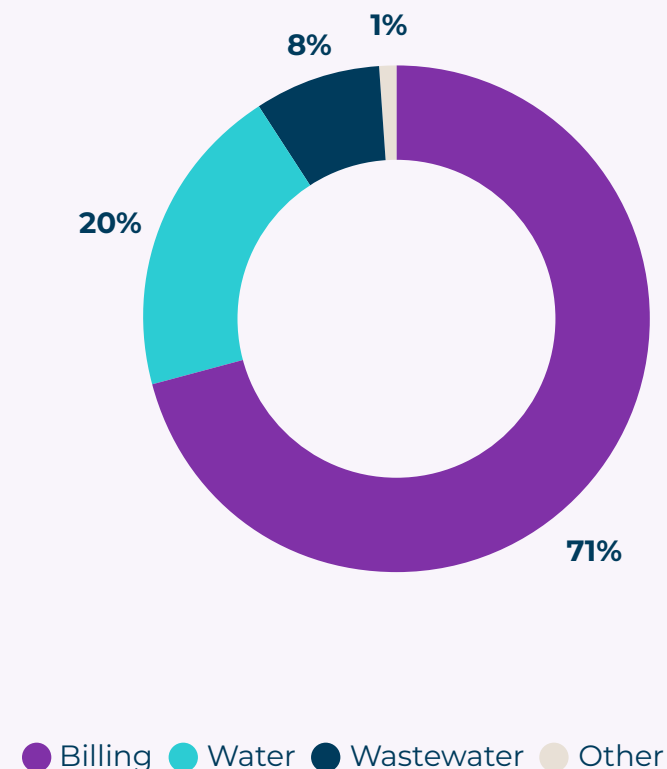
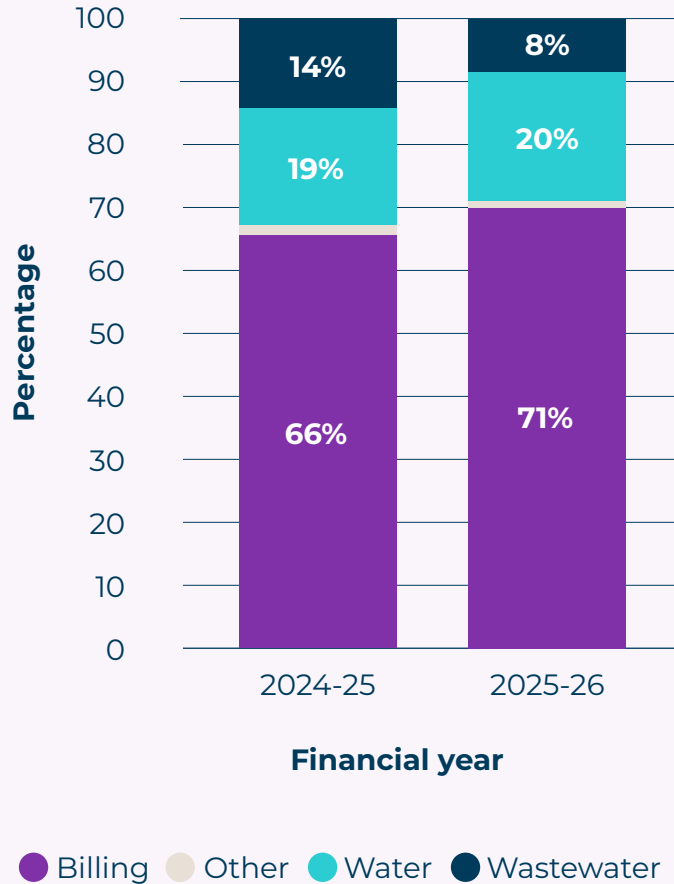


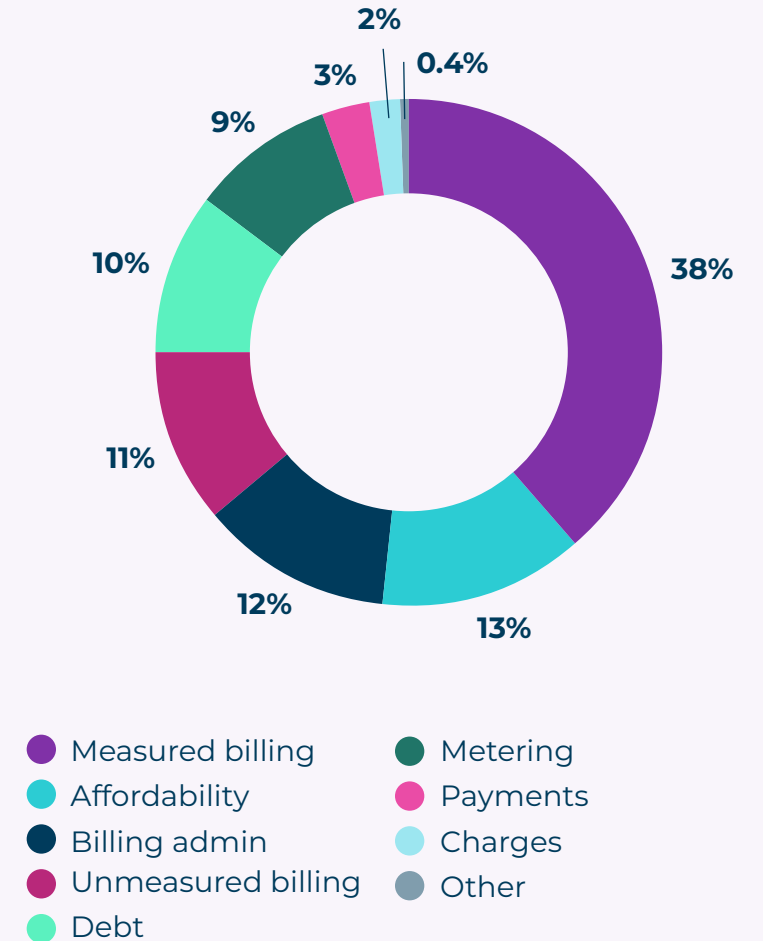
Figure 2 Household complaints to CCW by category 2025-26 vs 2024-25



Complaints about billing

The number of billing complaints received by CCW almost doubled, increasing from 5,445 in 2024-25 to 10,735 in 2025-26, up 97%. The top three causes of billing complaints to CCW in 2025-26 match the top three causes from 2024-25: problems with measured (metered) bills, affordability concerns and administration issues.

Figure 3 Billing complaints to CCW by main root causes in 2025-26



Measured billing complaints

Overall, complaints about measured (metered) billing rose 121% in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25. The most common complaints involved people disputing their bill (up 115% year on year), complaints about leakage allowances (up 171% year on year) and complaints about estimated bills (up 176% year on year).

Complaints from people disputing their measured bill accounted for 23%, nearly one in four, of all the complaints CCW handled in 2025-26. Sometimes, higher than expected bills are caused by leaks or inaccurate estimates, both of which CCW received complaints about, but sometimes the bill is higher than expected because people have used more water than they realised - a problem that has been compounded by the price increases.

Two thirds of households across England and Wales⁵ now pay for water through their meter. So helping people understand how much water they use day to day, allowing them to make positive choices to affect their bill as well as the environment, is hugely important. Smart water meters, which allow people to see how much

water they use every day, will have a role to play in this. Over the next few years, we will see increasing numbers of smart meters installed across England and Wales, a move supported by six in ten householders⁶. Companies must take this opportunity to speak to their customers and help them understand how the insight smart meters offer can help people be more aware of their water use.

Smart meters also open the door to new, innovative tariffs. Ofwat, the water industry's financial regulator, has challenged all companies to have trialled some form of new tariff by 2030⁷, some companies have already done this⁸. CCW will publish our view on what the trials are showing later this year. Innovative tariffs and smart meters offer a future where, although households cannot choose their water provider, they may be able to have greater influence on their bills based on how they use water.

⁵[Water Mark, operational performance excel, household metering appendix 8a](#)

⁶[Smart metering journeys for household customers - CCW](#)

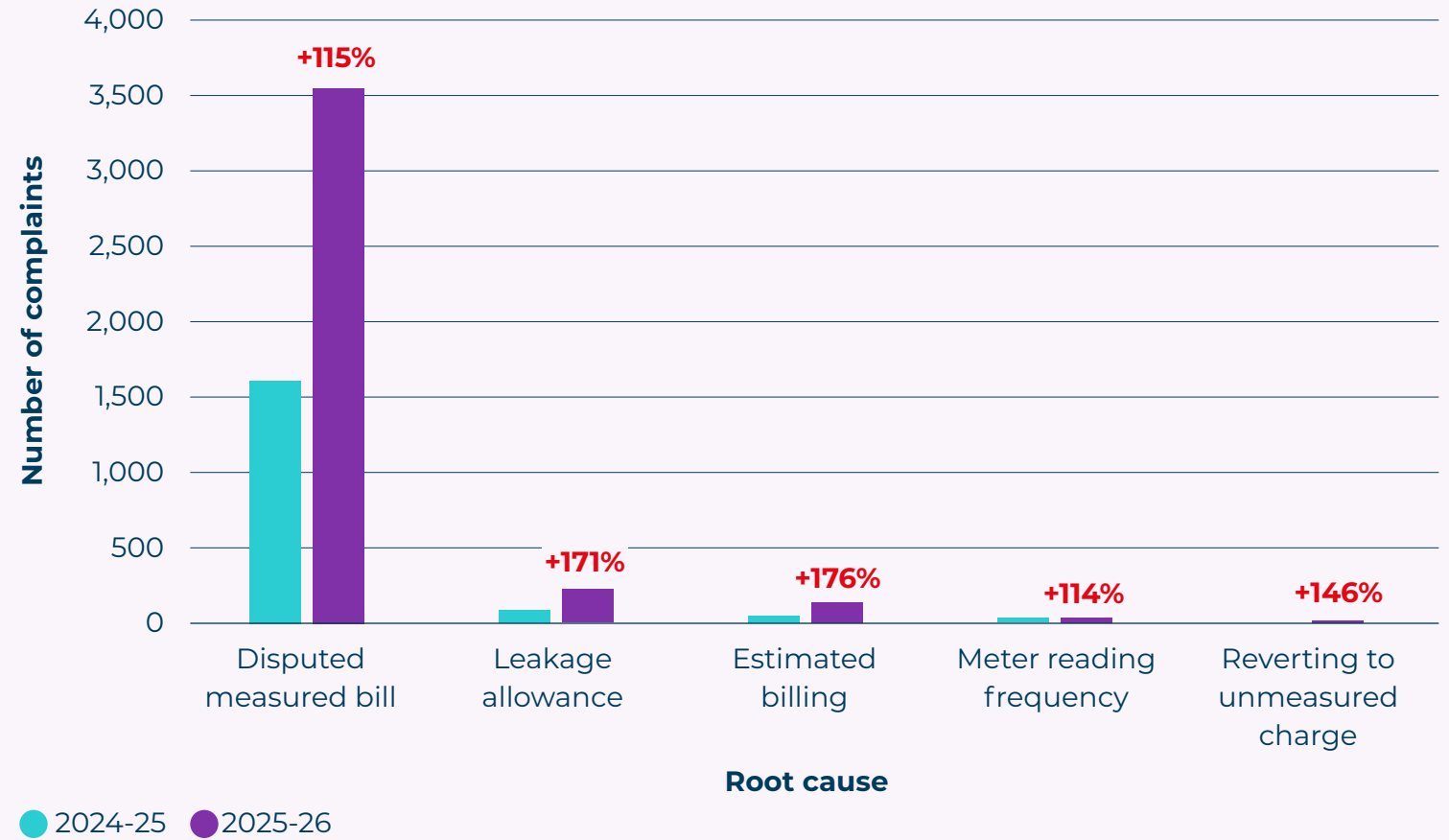
⁷[Summary-of-water-companies-published-plans-for-household-charging-trials.pdf](#)

⁸[Trialling different household charges - CCW](#)





Figure 4 Measured billing complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



Affordability complaints

While complaints increased sharply across 2025-26 (up 74% year on year), CCW had already begun to see affordability concerns emerge in the final quarter of 2024-25. Complaints about the bill increases themselves rose by 54%, complaints from consumers saying their bills had become unaffordable rose by 129%, and complaints about tariffs rose by 243%. Tariff complaints can relate to access to company social tariffs, the level of support available, or eligibility for national schemes such as WaterSure.

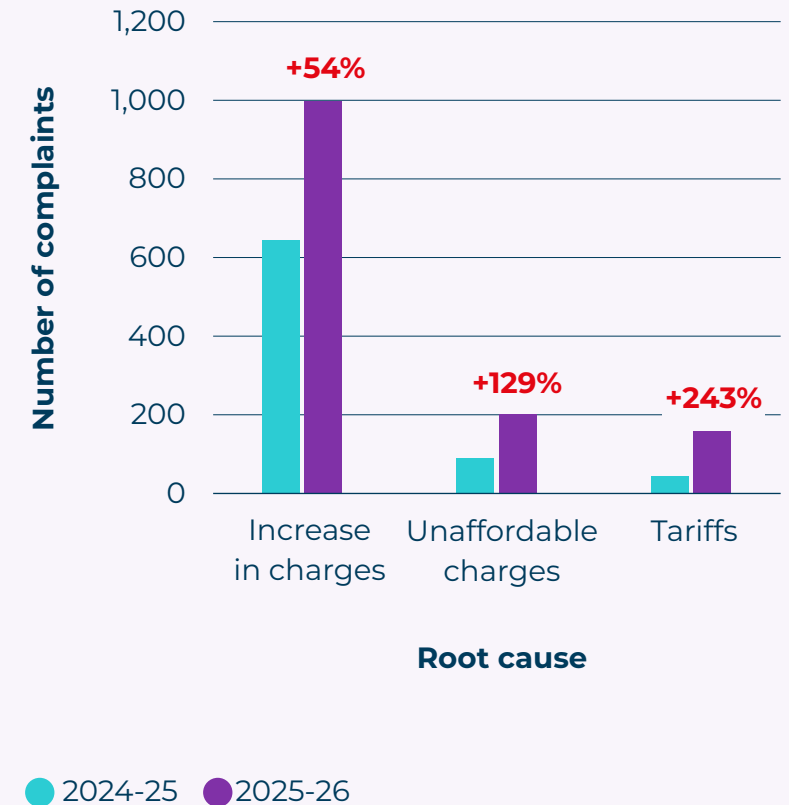
Behind these complaints were customers facing different challenges. Some were struggling to afford their bills, while others felt increases were unjustifiable. Across all affordability-related complaints, customers wanted similar information: a clear explanation about why their bill had changed, where their money was being spent and what difference that would make for them, what support was available, and what options they had if they were concerned about affordability.

Water companies offer a range of schemes to support customers who are struggling to pay their bills. However, the help available can vary depending on where someone lives and which company serves them.

CCW has long argued that this creates a social tariff postcode lottery, where households in similar circumstances can receive very different levels of support. In its 2021 affordability review⁹, CCW called for the introduction of a new single social tariff where everyone in England and Wales has access to help based on the same eligibility criteria and receives consistent support. CCW has continued to work with governments and industry to support the new single social tariff's development.

⁹[Our affordability review recommendations - CCW](#)

Figure 5 Affordability complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



Administration complaints

Administration complaints, up 72% year on year, cover a wide range of issues, from incorrect names and addresses on bills to goodwill payments not being made, refunds not being received, or customers struggling to contact their company. While these issues can appear routine, they often shape a customer's overall experience of their water company and influence whether they feel confident that concerns will be dealt with properly.

The most common billing administration complaint to CCW was about refunds. Customers complained either that a refund had been promised but not received when expected, or that they believed a refund was due but had been refused. Complaints about refunds rose by 70% in 2025-26. Complaints about agreed actions not being taken also increased sharply, from one complaint in 2024-25 to 46 in 2025-26.

These complaints point to the importance of setting clear expectations and following through on commitments. If a refund is due, customers should be told when it will be paid. If an action has been agreed, customers should know what will happen next, when it will happen and how they will be kept informed. Some of the complaints CCW received could have been avoided if customers had been given clear timescales at the end of their conversation, so they understood what would happen next and when.



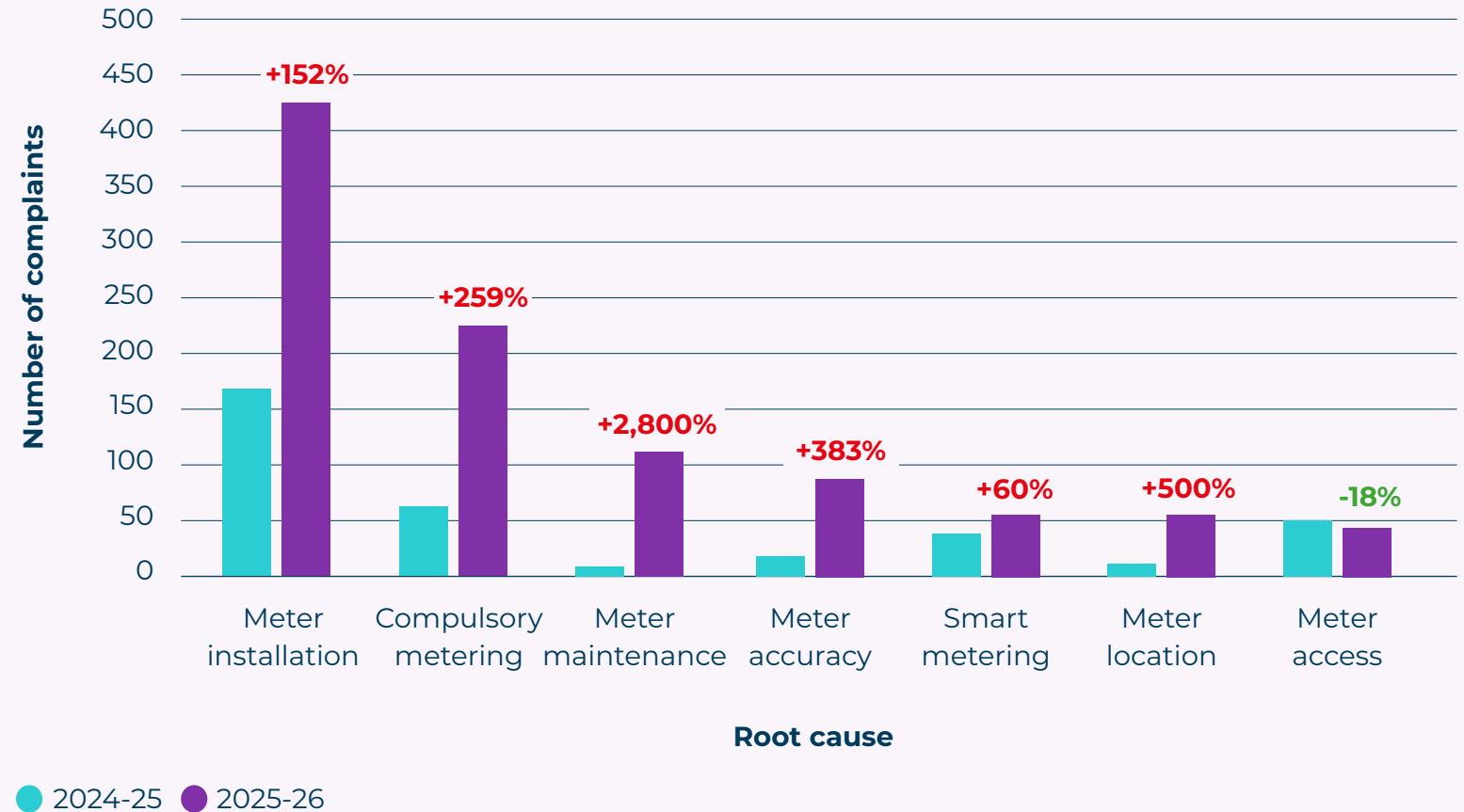
Metering complaints

Metering complaints increased by 189% year on year and accounted for 9% of all billing complaints received by CCW, providing useful insight into the concerns behind many billing complaints.

CCW saw a 152% year on year increase in meter installation complaints, many of which related to timescales or delays. Following the announcement of bill increases, more customers chose to move from unmetered to metered charging, hoping to pay for the water they used and gain a better understanding of their usage. This led to a significant increase in requests for meter installations. Some customers were told it could take several months for their meter to be fitted, leaving them unable to move onto their preferred charging method and causing understandable frustration.

We are pleased that installation times have since returned to more normal levels across the industry. CCW also pressed for the introduction of a guaranteed standard for

Figure 6 Metering complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



meter installation times and welcomes the new Guaranteed Standards of Service, which require water companies to install a meter and begin charging customers on measured charges within eight weeks of a request.

One of the main themes of metering complaints was customers questioning whether their meter was recording correctly, often because their bill was higher than expected. Complaints from customers who believed their meter was inaccurate increased by 383%, while complaints about meters needing maintenance or replacement increased by 2,800%. Although this large percentage increase reflects a rise from just four complaints in 2024-25 to 116 complaints in 2025-26, it still highlights a growing concern among customers. Water meters are designed to last for many years and require little maintenance. They are rarely inaccurate, but if they do develop a fault it tends to be under recording rather than over recording that is the issue. The increase in complaints highlights the importance of companies providing clear explanations and reassurance when customers have concerns about their meter or their charges.

CCW also saw a 464% increase in complaints from customers who wanted a meter but were unable to have one installed (captured in unmeasured billing complaints). These complaints often came from people living in flats or properties with shared supply pipes, where fitting a meter can be more challenging. At the same time, complaints about compulsory metering schemes increased by 259%, while complaints from customers wanting to revert from metered to unmetered charges increased by 146%, rising from 13 complaints to 32 (recorded in measured billing complaints).

These complaints show that customers view meters in different ways. Some see them as a way to take greater control of their bills, while others are concerned about the impact metered charging may have on what they pay. This makes it important that customers have easy access to clear information about metering, water efficiency and the support available to them.





Case study

Amanda requested a water meter in March 2025, but it was not installed until late November 2025, despite several follow-ups and a formal complaint.

At stage 1 (August 2025), there was still no installation date. The company apologised but took no action, and Amanda remained on higher unmetered charges. At stage 2 (November 2025), the delay had reached seven months, and the meter was finally scheduled to be installed.

Throughout the time she was waiting for the meter installation, Amanda was charged up to £99 per month. Once the meter was installed, her bills dropped to around £40, showing how much she saved through only paying for what she used. Amanda estimated she had paid around £2,330 more than she would have done if she'd had the meter installed sooner. So she asked for charges to be backdated, which the company refused.

CCW would not expect a company to compensate a customer for years of paying an unmeasured bill when the option to have a meter fitted was always open to them. But where installation is delayed, CCW does expect companies to put the customer in the financial

position they would have been had the meter been installed in good time.

The delayed meter installation had caused Amanda stress, taken up her time in having to chase the company and make complaints, and cost her money as her metered bill was cheaper than her unmetered bill.

Amanda came to CCW. We challenged the poor service and the big delay, which had caused financial detriment. The company gave Amanda a refund of £477.69.

Debt complaints

Complaints about debt rose by 109% year on year and made up 10% of the billing complaints CCW received in 2025-26. The most common complaints to CCW about debt were about backdated charges or catch-up bills, which increased 341% year on year.

Catch-up bills tend to happen when a meter reading has previously been underestimated and an actual reading is taken revealing that more water has been used than previously billed. The resulting bill covers both current usage and the

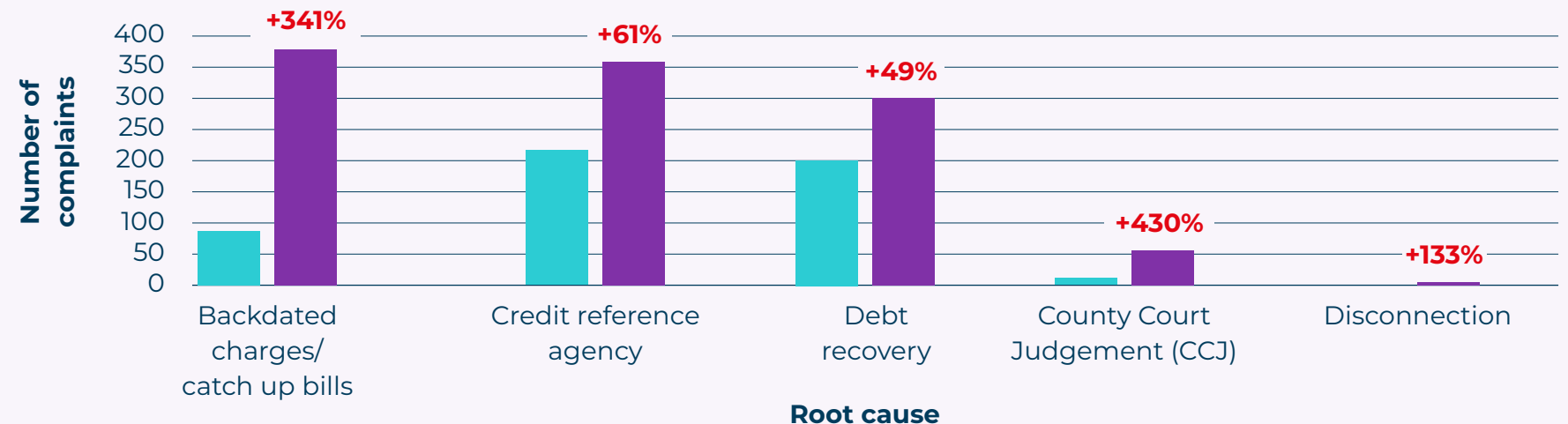
difference between what had been charged and what should have been charged.

In 2025-26, this often coincided with higher water charges, creating a double impact for customers. Many found themselves having to pay previously unbilled charges at the same time as adjusting to higher prices.

For customers who receive bills less frequently, the effect could be even greater. In some cases, bills included higher summer water use as well as the impact of price rises, resulting in unexpectedly large balances and concerns about debt.

These complaints highlight the importance of timely billing and accurate meter readings. Smart meters should help reduce the problems associated with estimated bills by automatically providing meter readings and reducing the need for estimates. However, companies also need to ensure bills are issued promptly and that payment arrangements, including Direct Debits, are reviewed when prices change. Without this, customers who make regular payments and believe they are managing their account well could still find themselves unexpectedly building up debt.

Figure 7 Debt complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



● 2024-25 ● 2025-26

Unmeasured billing

Unmeasured billing complaints to CCW increased by 92% year on year. There are four main causes of these complaints: disputes about the rateable value¹⁰ charge itself, complaints about assessed charges (an alternative fixed charge offered where a meter cannot be fitted), disputes about unmeasured bills, and complaints that the option of a meter is not available.

Disputes over the unmeasured bill (up 65% year on year) and the rateable value itself (up 55% year on year) remain the most common reasons

¹⁰The rateable value charge is a fixed annual bill that many customers pay if their property does not have a meter. Calculated from the estimated rental value of the property set by the Inland Revenue, the valuation system ended in 1990 so valuations cannot be changed. The only way to change the water bill is for a customer to apply for a water meter to be fitted and pay metered charges instead. Where a meter cannot be fitted, companies offer an assessed charge alternative to the rateable value charge.

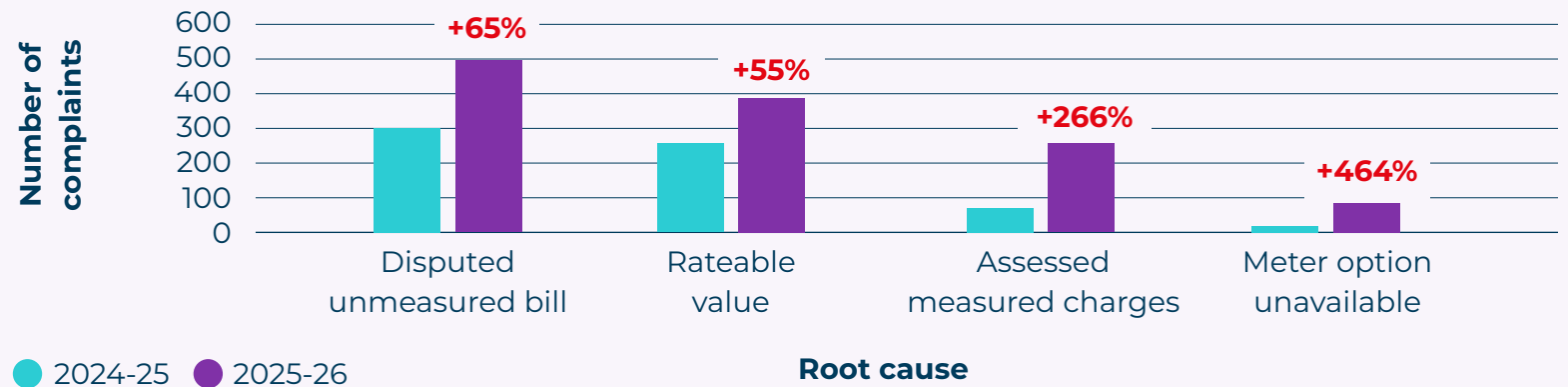
for an unmeasured bill complaint. Based on an old valuation system, paying the rateable value charge means the water bill has no relation to the volume of water being used at the property. Smaller households (where there are an equal number or more bedrooms than there are people in a property) and frugal water users can be surprised when their bill does not seem to reflect fair value for their usage. The alternative to paying the rateable value charge is to have a water meter fitted but this is not always possible.

Complaints to CCW about the meter option being unavailable rose by 464% in 2025-26 compared to

2024-25. If a meter cannot be fitted, a company will offer an assessed charge, an alternative fixed rate, normally based on the number of bedrooms or occupiers in the property. Complaints to CCW about assessed charges rose by 266% year on year.

Whilst the certainty of paying a fixed charge can be positive for some households, the increase in complaints about unmeasured billing might suggest an increasing number of unmetered households now looking to take control of their bill and pay only for what they use.

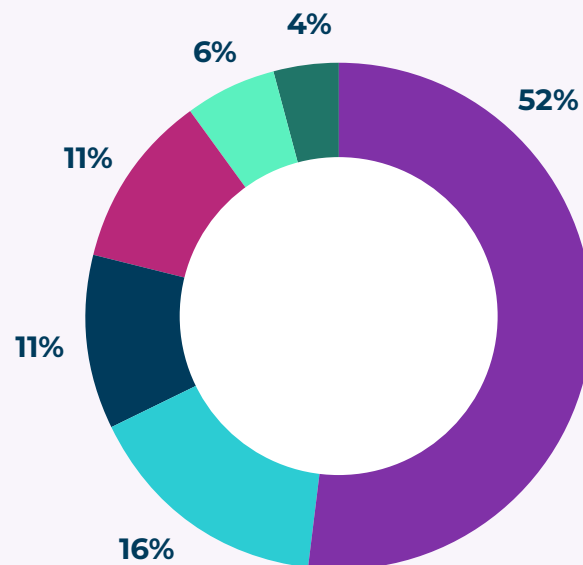
Figure 8 Unmeasured billing complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



Complaints about water

Water complaints rose by 101%, increasing from 1,527 in 2024-25 to 3,063 in 2025-26, accounting for 20% of all complaints CCW received in 2025-26. These types of complaint often involve issues that have an immediate impact on customers' daily lives. Whether it is a leak, a supply interruption, flooding or delays in repairs, customers expect water companies to respond quickly, communicate clearly and minimise disruption.

Figure 9 Water complaints to CCW by main root cause 2025-26



- Pipework
- Water supply
- Water pressure
- Water admin
- Metering operational
- Water quality



Water pipework

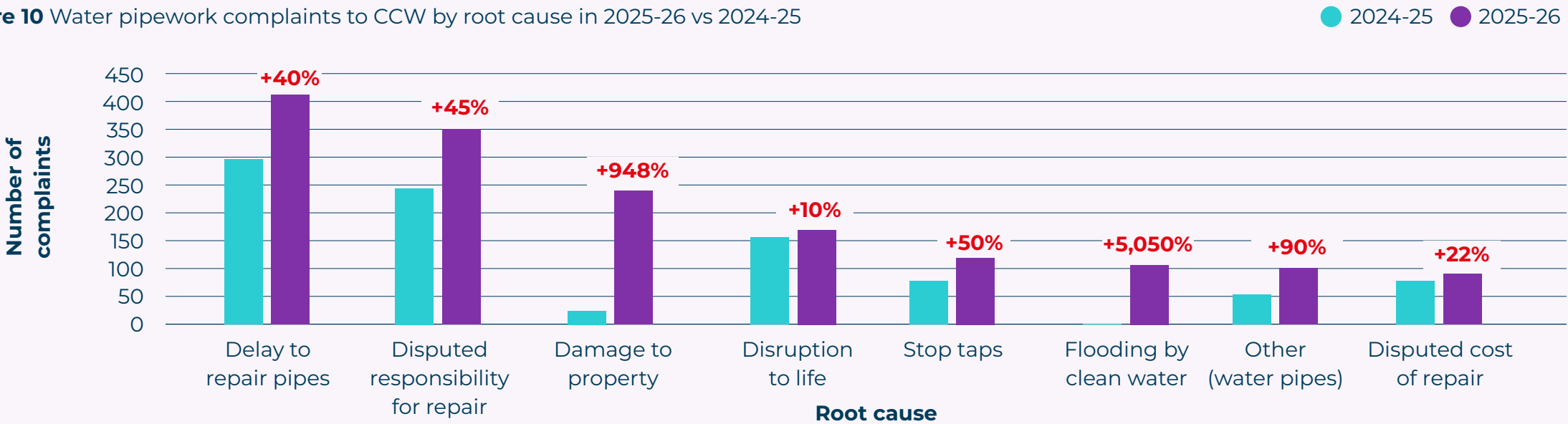
Pipework complaints increased by 72% year on year. This category includes issues relating to pipe ownership, repair costs, repair times, and flooding or disruption caused by pipe failures. The most common cause of complaint was delays in repairing water pipes, which was also the leading cause of pipework complaints in 2024-25. More than a quarter (26%) of pipework complaints received by CCW related to repair delays.

As awareness of water scarcity grows and households are encouraged to use water wisely, customers expect companies to act quickly when water is being lost. Delays in repairing known or visible leaks can therefore undermine confidence and lead to complaints.

The biggest increases in pipework complaints received by CCW were for flooding caused by clean water (up from two complaints in 2024-25 to 103 in 2025-26, a 5,050% increase) and in damage to

property caused by repairs or work on water pipes (up from 23 in 2024-25 to 241 in 2025-26, a 948% increase). Having property damaged or flooded by water is often highly distressing and disruptive for customers, making these increases particularly concerning.

Figure 10 Water pipework complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



Supply issues

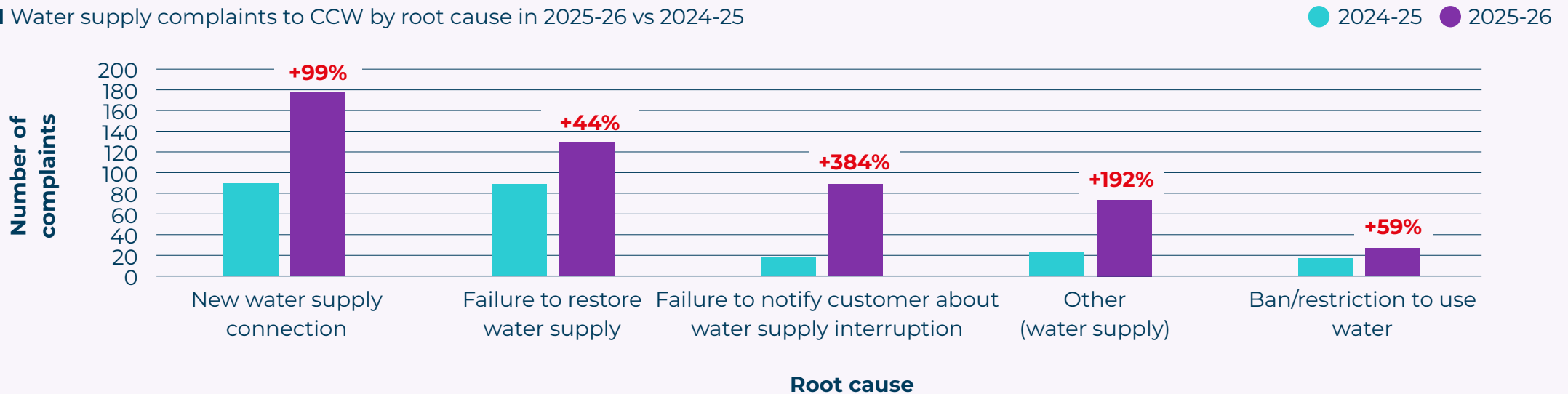
Complaints about water supply increased by 107% in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25. This category includes complaints about usage restrictions (such as hosepipe bans), supply interruptions and new water supply connections.

The biggest increase in complaints in this category was around supply interruptions, with failure to notify of an interruption increasing from 19 complaints in 2024-25 to 92 in 2025-26.

It is not always possible to notify customers of an interruption to supply. When Storm Goretti hit the UK in January 2026, companies worked hard to keep water supply running and minimise disruption and in the majority of cases they succeeded. Customers accept that in extreme weather, interruptions will occur and reconnection can be hard. However, where work is planned and companies know supplies will be interrupted, customers should receive clear and timely notice so they can prepare.

The biggest cause of supply complaint in 2025-26 has been new water supply connections. Many of these complaints stemmed from delays in the developer services process, which affected customers waiting for new connections. CCW has worked with the companies involved to address these issues and expects complaint numbers to decline as improvements take effect.

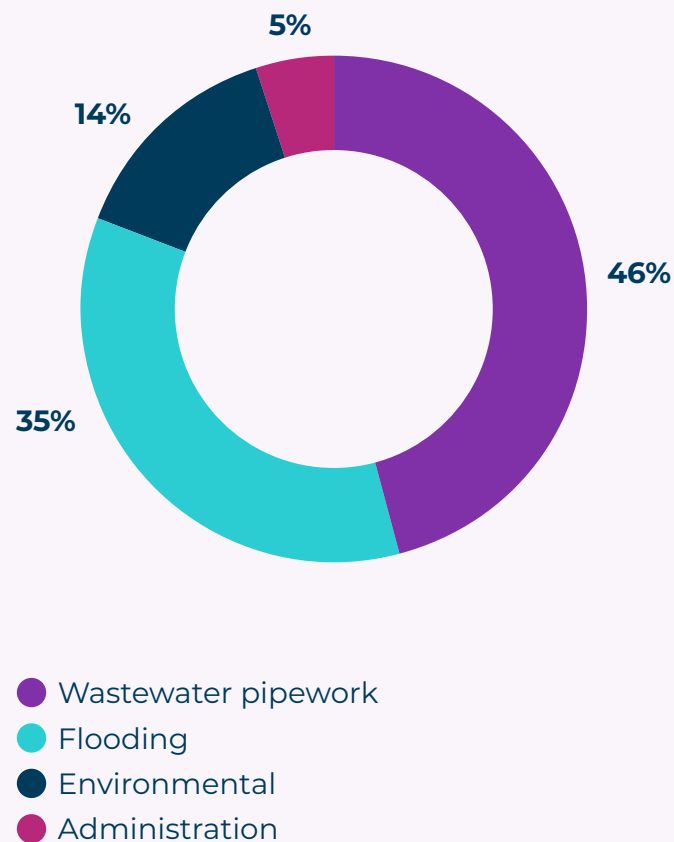
Figure 11 Water supply complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



Wastewater complaints

Complaints to CCW about wastewater increased by 7% in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25, from 1,159 to 1,240. Similarly to water complaints, the largest share of wastewater complaints in 2025-26 were about pipework, which increased by 41% year on year. Complaints about flooding by sewage decreased from 46% of wastewater complaints to CCW in 2024-25 to 35% in 2025-26 but over one in three wastewater complaints were still about this appalling experience.

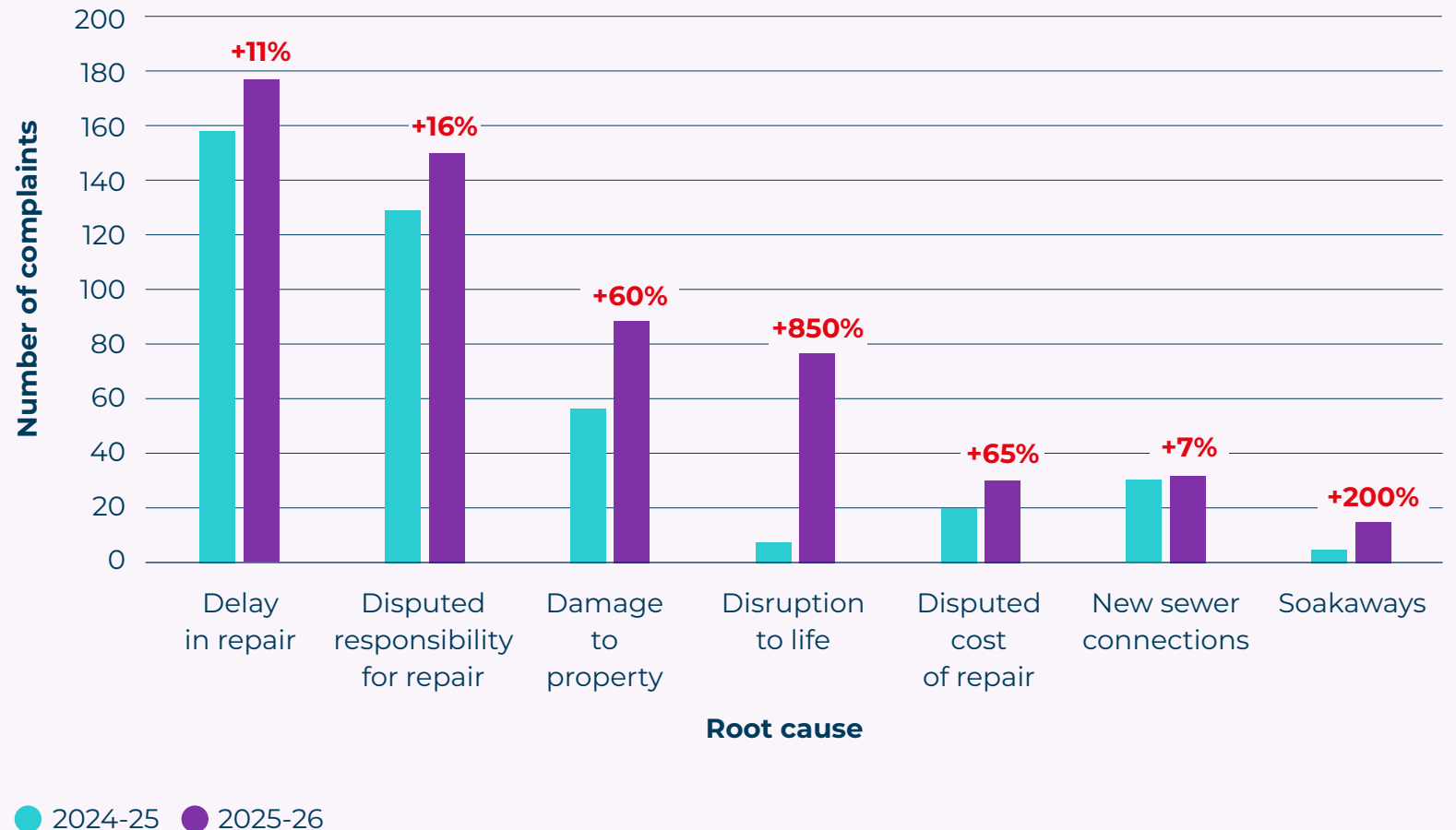
Figure 12 Wastewater complaints to CCW in 2025-26



Wastewater pipework

Complaints about wastewater pipes increased by 41% year on year. The time it takes to repair a wastewater pipe and disputed liability for making that repair (i.e. whether it is the company or the customer who should get it done) accounted for over 50% of all the wastewater pipework complaints that CCW received from customers in 2025-26. However, the biggest increase in complaints was about disruption to people's lives caused by repairs or work being done on wastewater pipes. This shot up by 850%, from just eight complaints to CCW in 2024-25 to 76 in 2025-26.

Figure 13 Wastewater pipework complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



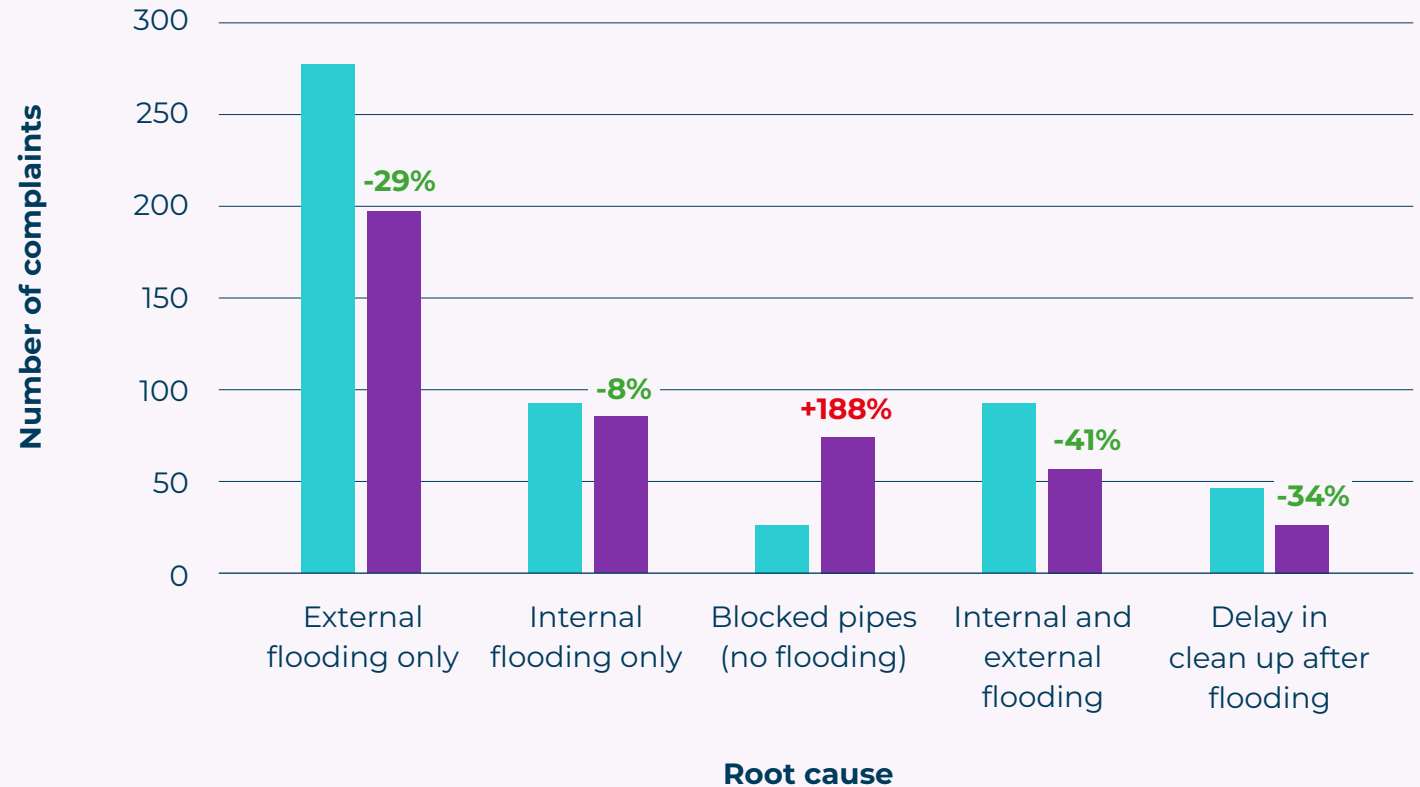
Flooding

It is very encouraging to see complaints to CCW about flooding by wastewater decreasing, by 17% compared to 2024-25. CCW's spring/summer 2024¹¹ research with Ofwat into customers' flooding experiences had shown some slight improvements in more straightforward cases, but there was far more work to be done. In 2025-26, complaints about external flooding decreased by 29%, internal flooding complaints fell by 8% and those related to people suffering both internal and external flooding at once dropped by 41%. CCW also saw complaints about delays in clean up after a flood drop by 34%.

Complaints about blocked pipes, which caused no flooding, increased by 188%, from 26 in 2024-25 to 75 in 2025-26. Whilst perhaps not as devastating as having wastewater flooding into the home, blocked pipes often result in distressing situations like people not being able to flush their toilets.

¹¹[Sewer-flooding-experiences-wave-two-research.pptx](#)

Figure 14 Wastewater flooding complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



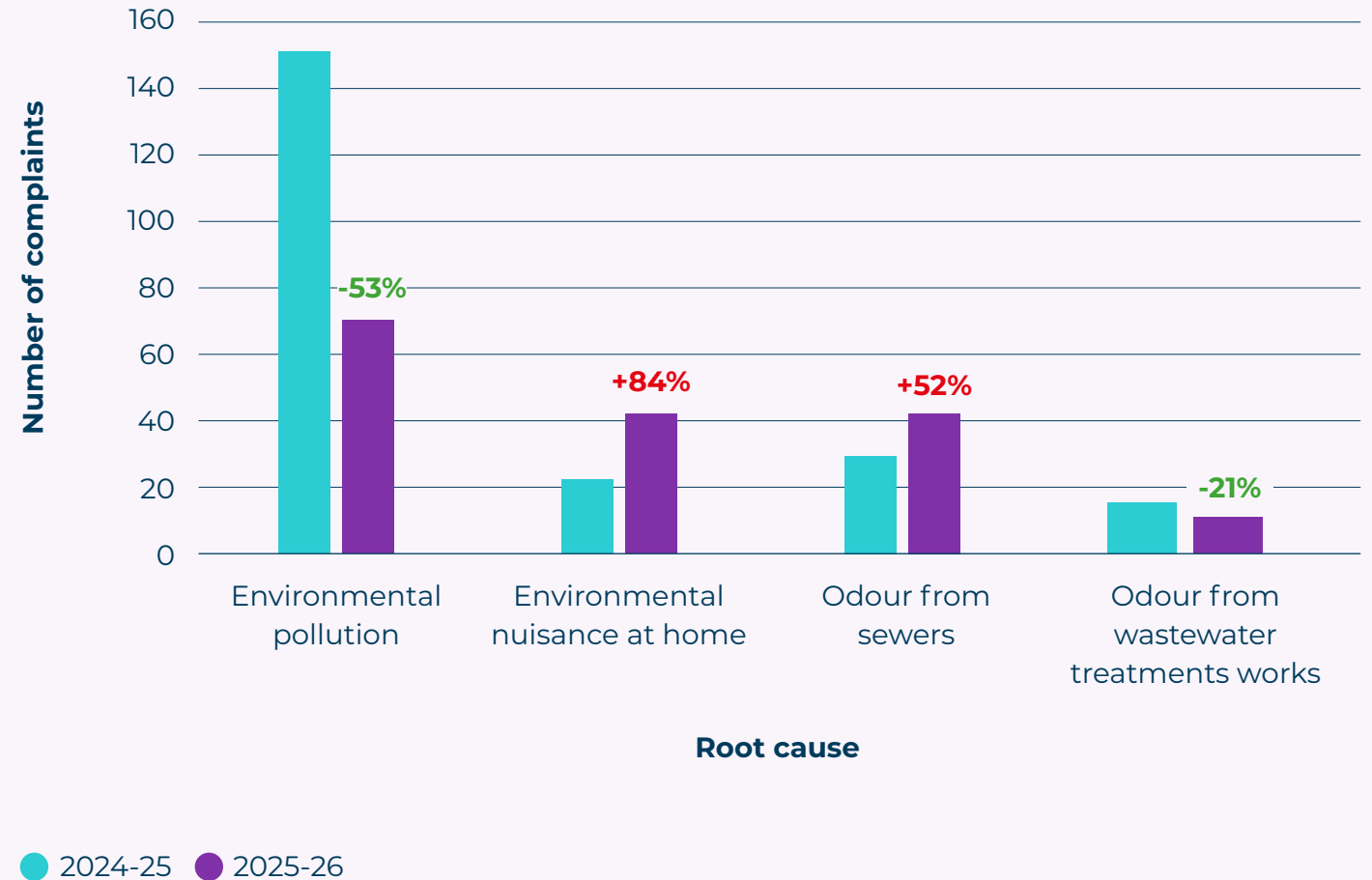
● 2024-25 ● 2025-26

Environmental

Environmental wastewater complaints decreased by 21% in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25. In 2024-25, 19% of wastewater complaints to CCW were about environmental issues. In 2025-26, that proportion dropped to 14%. This is mostly down to a decrease in complaints about environmental pollution, which fell by 53%. Despite this, it is still the biggest cause of environmental complaint to CCW. In CCW and Ofwat's customer priorities tracking survey¹², whilst clean, safe water and ending wastewater flooding are top priorities, stopping pollution entering rivers and seas is still considered to be of high importance by 85% of people.

¹²[Customer priorities tracking research - CCW](#)

Figure 15 Environmental complaints to CCW by root cause in 2025-26 vs 2024-25



Extra support for people in vulnerable circumstances

Speaking to thousands of people every year, CCW is only too aware that almost everyone experiences a time in their life when they are vulnerable and need some additional support. Standard processes do not always best serve people experiencing vulnerability in the best way. To address this, in April 2025, CCW created a Dedicated Support Team (DST). Our team of caseworkers are specially trained to help people in a way that works for them, adapting our processes and services to make sure that they feel fully supported.

In 2025-26, CCW's DST supported 602 customers with their cases. Of those cases, only four progressed beyond CCW's assistance to the adjudication scheme. While this is not a direct measure of customer satisfaction, we believe that a 99% resolution rate is evidence that tailored support can help bring cases to a more amenable resolution.

Prior to the creation of our DST, we noticed that while only 2% of customers coming to CCW identified themselves as being in vulnerable circumstances, they accounted for a third of the customers who progressed to the adjudication scheme. In 2025-26, the four cases from people in vulnerable circumstances that progressed to the adjudication scheme made up just 2% of the cases. We believe this demonstrates the positive impact tailored support can have in helping to resolve issues earlier and reducing the need for vulnerable customers to progress to adjudication.

Because our DST has been so successful in helping resolve issues for customers in vulnerable circumstances, we will be speaking to all water companies in 2026-27 about the benefits we have seen and encouraging them to adopt a similar approach.





Case study



Jennifer, a neurodivergent customer who was also caring for a disabled child, came to CCW's Dedicated Support Team (DST) following a long-running and distressing issue with her water account.

The problem began when Jennifer was taken off her company's social tariff after a mistake on an online form. The form had been difficult for her to complete as the system did not allow her to check what she had entered before submitting. As a result, Jennifer began to struggle financially and built up debt on her account.

Over several months, she repeatedly asked the company to help her, leading to ten stage 2 responses. Although, by the time Jennifer came to CCW, her company had explained why she'd been removed from the social tariff, offered £50 in goodwill, and waived £89.30 to clear the balance she had built up, she remained unhappy and felt the issue hadn't been properly resolved. It was clear from the number of complaints Jennifer had made that she was struggling to get her company to understand how she felt and what she needed to resolve the problem.

CCW's DST spoke to the company to address the customer's outstanding questions and worked through the available options for resolution. We were able to agree a resolution with the company that worked for the customer, which amounted to £350 of goodwill redress and a new, affordable payment plan being set up with Jennifer back on the right tariff for her.

By recognising the adjustments that Jennifer needed and advocating on her behalf, CCW's DST was able to resolve a long-running issue and deliver a fair and practical outcome without further escalation.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

CCW does everything possible to resolve complaints when people bring them to us. However, there are occasions where we believe the right outcome has been reached, but the customer disagrees. And very rarely, a company will refuse to agree to a recommendation CCW makes. For either of these outcomes, there is the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) process.

Cases that move to ADR can follow one of two routes: mediation or adjudication. CCW supports customers 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. Mediation tends to be quicker and works well for less complex cases, whereas adjudication can take up to 35 working days but is more appropriate for complex issues.

In 2025-26, 228 cases progressed to ADR, representing just 1.5% of all complaints CCW handled across the year. Of these, 44 cases entered mediation. Although CCW recommended

mediation for 90 cases, both parties must agree before mediation can proceed. Of the 44 mediated cases, 32, or 73%, reached a successful outcome.

Where mediation was not appropriate, or where it was unsuccessful, a case may proceed to adjudication. Of the 228 cases that progressed to ADR, 133 cases went to adjudication. Twenty remained open at the end of the reporting year. Of the cases that concluded, ten were upheld in the customer's favour, five resulted in a split decision, and the remainder were upheld in favour of the company. This represents an 11% success rate, a decrease of 2% from 2024-25. While company-favourable outcomes will have been disappointing for the customers involved, they also indicate that most complaints are resolved before adjudication. Of the 321,347 complaints made to companies, only 0.04% were not resolved either directly by the company or through CCW's intervention.

Finally, of the 228 cases that progressed to ADR, 19 were not accepted. A case can be rejected from

ADR for a number of reasons, such as the matter being more appropriate for a different body (e.g. ICO, DWI) or a non-household retailer being part of a different scheme.

Since April 2026, CCW no longer runs ADR for the water industry. However, companies continue to offer this route for customers who remain unhappy after CCW's intervention.



3

Complaints from customers to their water companies

Total complaints to water companies	32
Stage 2 complaints to water companies	34
Individual company performance	37

Total complaints to water companies

Customers across England and Wales made more complaints to their water companies in 2025-26 than in the previous year. Complaints increased by 56%, rising from 205,853 in 2024-25 to 321,347 in 2025-26. The April 2025 bill rises were a significant factor behind this increase. Additionally, across the year public confidence in the water industry has been challenged, with media stories around pollution, floods in winter, water shortages in summer, and executive pay and bonuses. There is much for the industry to do in restoring customer trust and confidence. To reduce complaints, companies must focus on providing a high standard of core services, billing accurately, and reducing the effort customers need to make when interacting with their water company.

Companies record complaints in the same three categories as CCW; billing, water and wastewater (sewerage). Billing issues consistently make up the largest category of complaint, and 2025-26 was no exception. In fact, the proportion of billing complaints grew for the third year running.

Figure 16 Household complaints to companies year on year

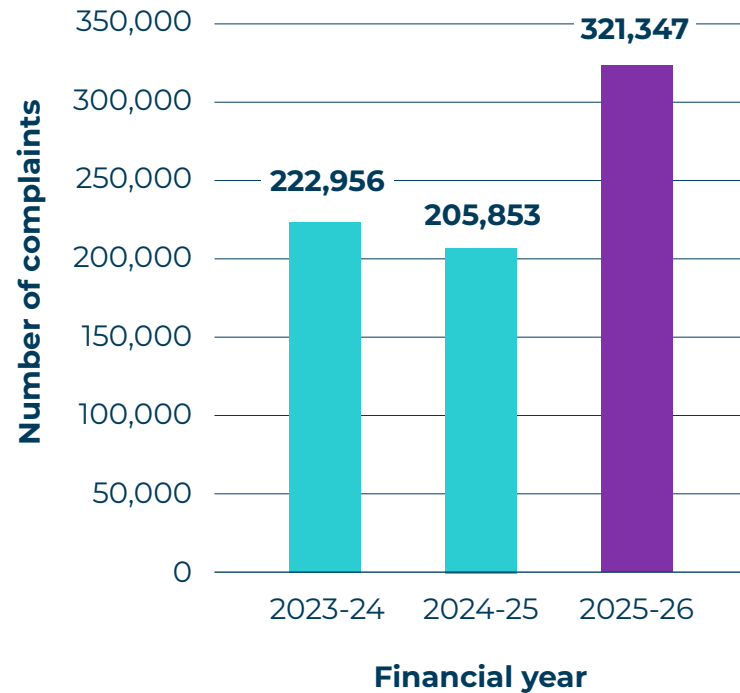
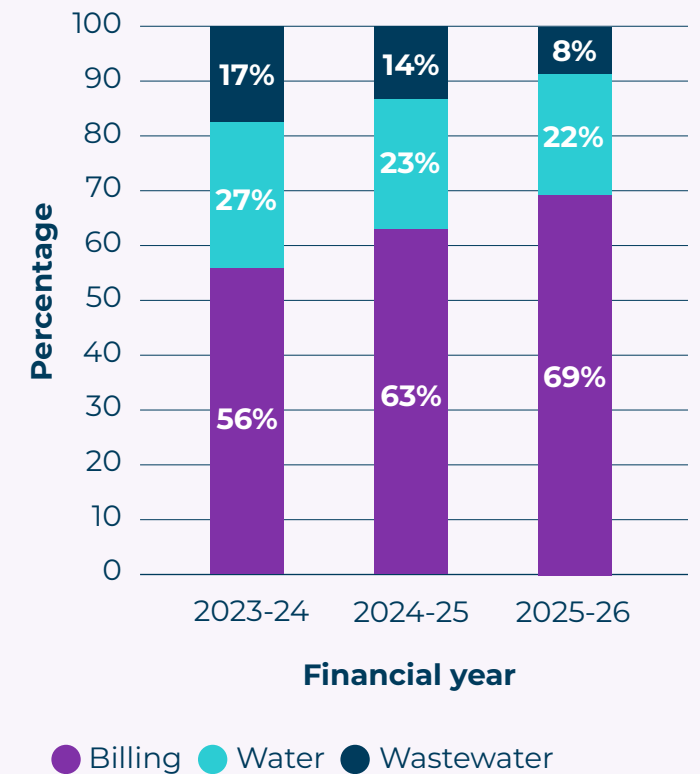
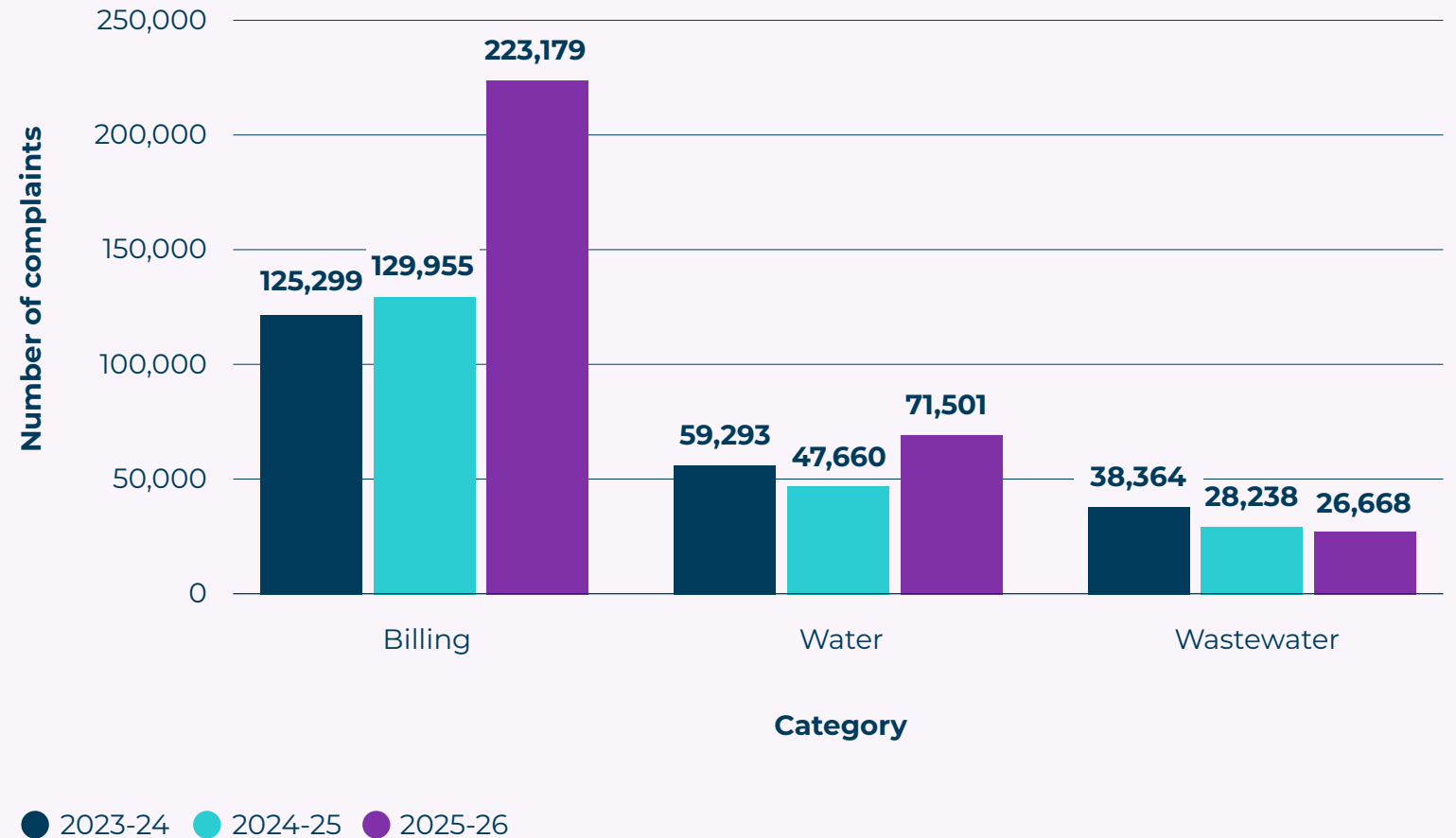


Figure 17 Household complaints to companies by category



The number of billing complaints increased by 72%, the number of water complaints increased by 50% and the number of wastewater complaints decreased by 6%, compared to the previous year.

Figure 18 Household complaints to companies by category year on year



Stage 2 complaints to water companies

If a customer is unhappy with a company's first response to their complaint, they can ask for the matter to be escalated to the second stage in the company's complaint procedure. Unsurprisingly, given the steep increase in complaints, the number of stage 2 complaints rose in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25 too, by 26%.

When we look at the trend of stage 2 cases as a proportion of stage 1, there is a downward trend in the percentage of customers who feel the need to escalate their complaint.

In 2023-24, 8.3% of stage 1 complaints went to stage 2. In 2024-25, 6.9% of stage 1 complaints went to stage 2. In 2025-26, 5.6% of the 321,347 stage 1 complaints went to stage 2.

Figure 19 Stage 2 complaints to companies year on year

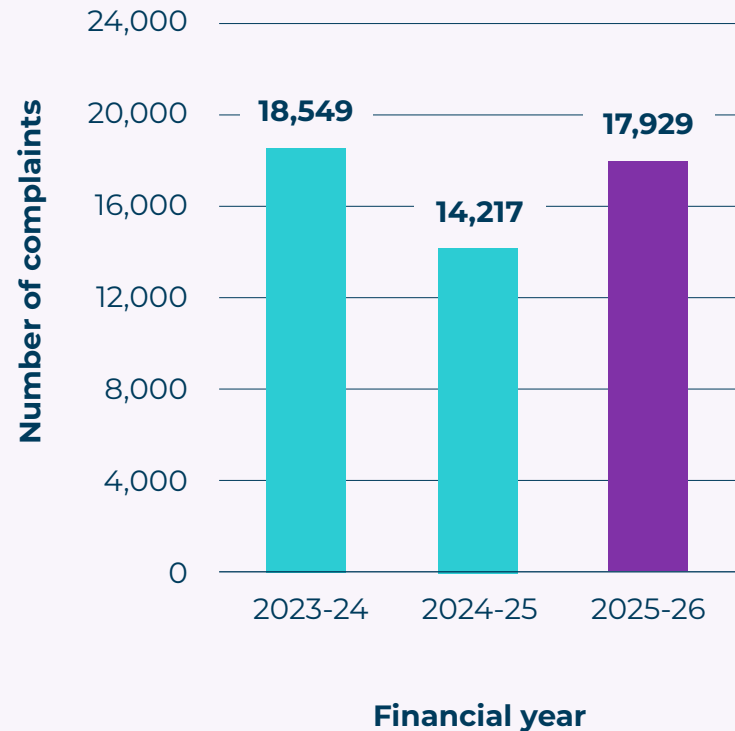


Figure 20 Stage 2 as a proportion of total complaints

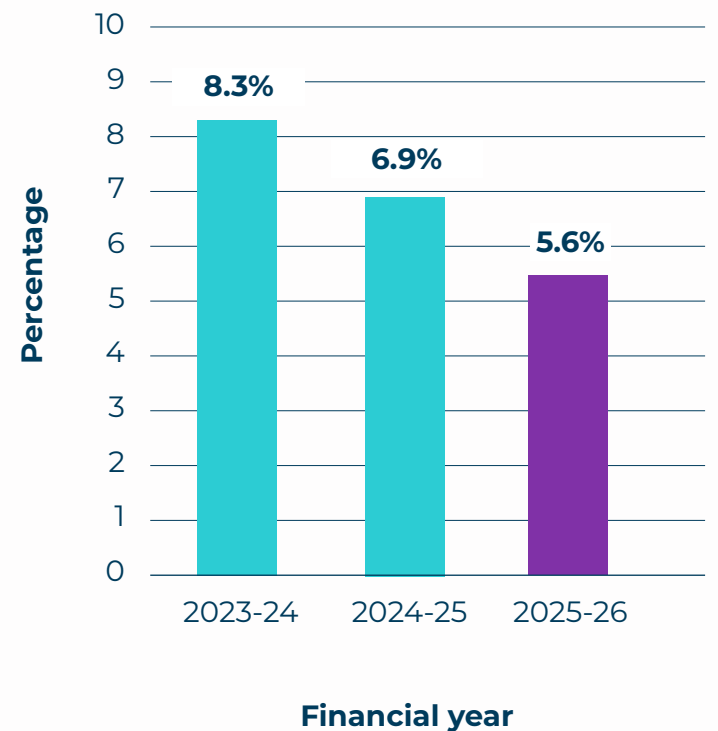
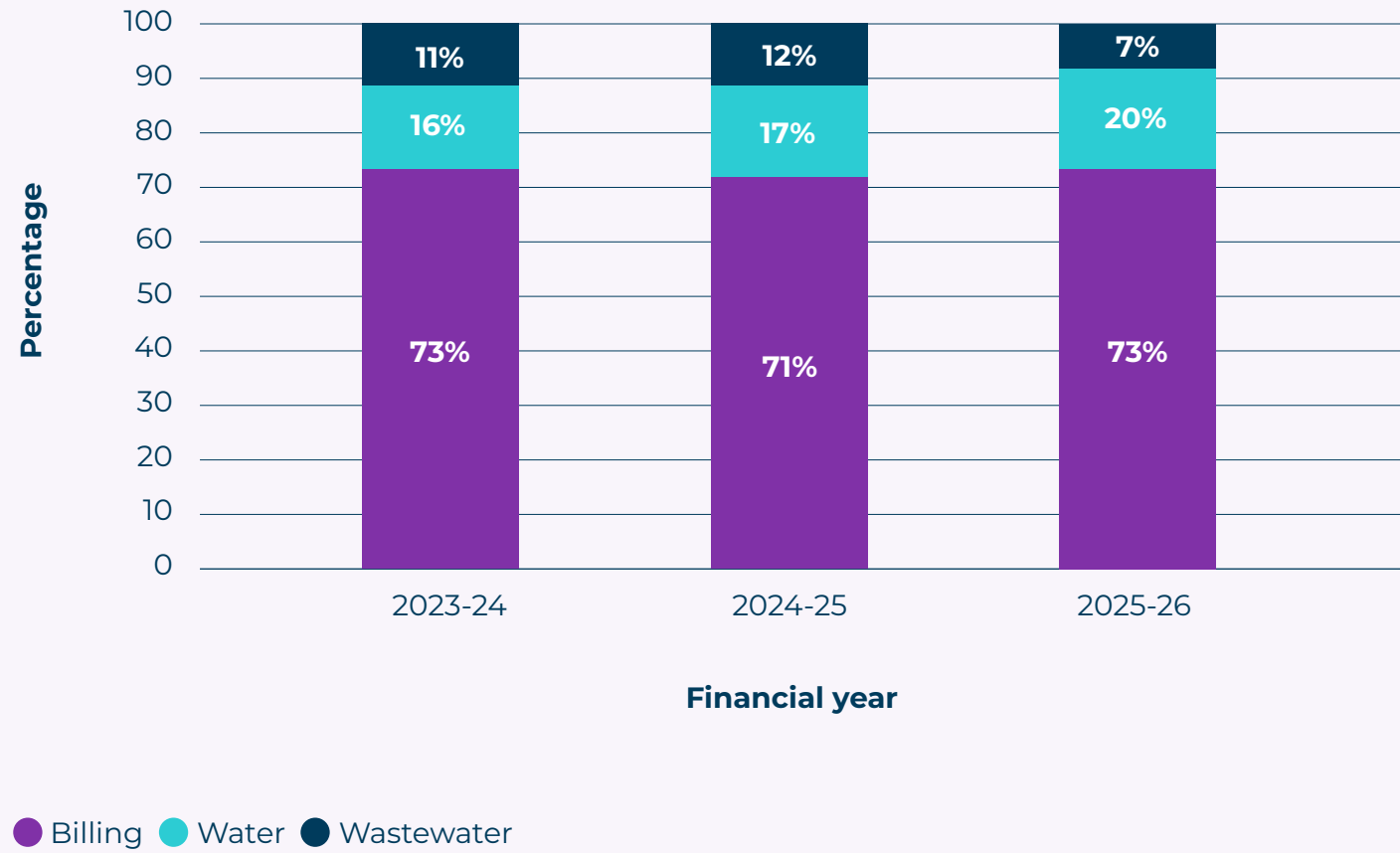




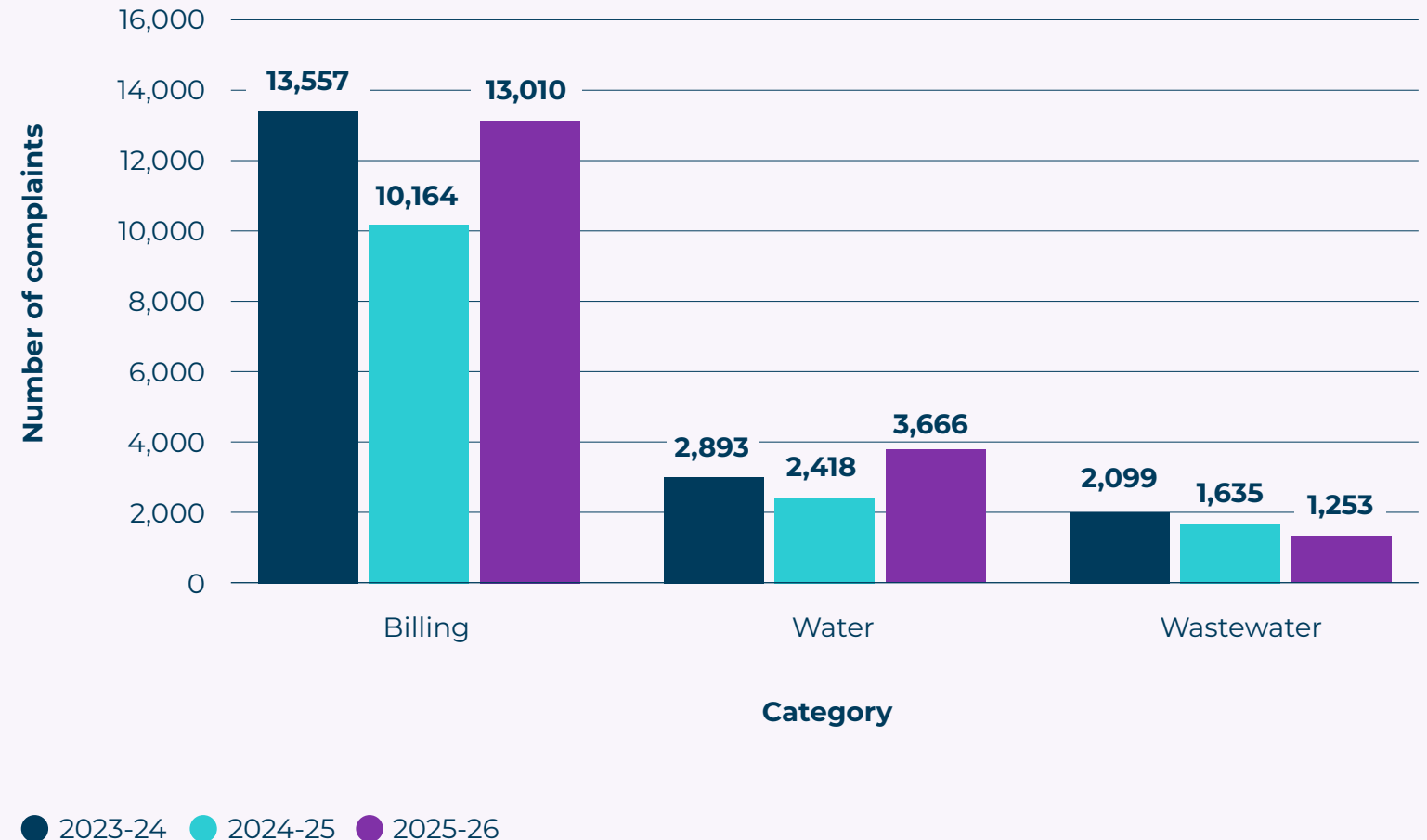
Figure 21 Stage 2 complaints to companies by category



As with stage 1 complaints, billing issues make up the majority of the stage 2 complaints. However, unlike at stage 1, the proportion of billing complaints has remained relatively static over the last three years. However, in 2025-26 we have seen an increase in the proportion of water-related stage 2 complaints.

The data shows that the number of billing stage 2 complaints increased by 28%, while water stage 2 complaints increased by 52% (and wastewater stage 2 complaints decreased by 23%). Companies do not provide CCW with data on the underlying causes of their complaints, so we do not know what caused the increase in stage 2 water complaints. This means we cannot tell whether the reasons are the same as the key causes of water complaints to CCW.

Figure 22 Stage 2 complaints to companies by category year on year



Individual company performance

CCW examines the performance of individual water companies by comparing them with others that provide the same main services. This means comparing water and sewerage companies separately from water-only companies.

CCW also considers 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.

Our comparison takes into account two distinct metrics for performance: the total complaints made to companies by customers and our complaint effort metric¹³. The complaint effort metric provides a more holistic picture of how

much effort customers have had to put into resolving their complaint - a key concern for CCW. 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 at stage 1 - and the number of complaints customers bring to CCW for resolution.

Not all issues that customers bring to CCW are ready for our intervention. Sometimes people approach us before they have spoken to their company. Sometimes they come to us with a stage 1 resolution to ask for advice before deciding whether they are happy with the offered outcome. In these cases, where CCW does not actively pick up the complaint on the customer's behalf, there is a level of effort involved for the customer in reaching resolution - another phone call has been made, an email sent or webform completed to try and get their issue resolved.

The methodology for all of CCW's calculations is

shown in Appendix 1a and the individual complaint effort calculations are in Appendix 1b, alongside all company data.

This section notes the companies that demonstrated better than average performance in both metrics or worse than average performance in both metrics. A company may receive a high number of complaints but handle them well, or receive relatively few complaints but handle them poorly. Customers do not want to complain, so the ideal is for companies to not generate complaints, but if they do, they should handle them well.

¹³This was previously called the complaint handling metric, but CCW has changed the name to reflect that a company might handle a complaint correctly and still the customer may contact CCW seeking assurance on the outcome, reflecting the level of effort a customer makes in resolving their complaint.

Complaints to Water and Sewerage Companies (WaSCs)

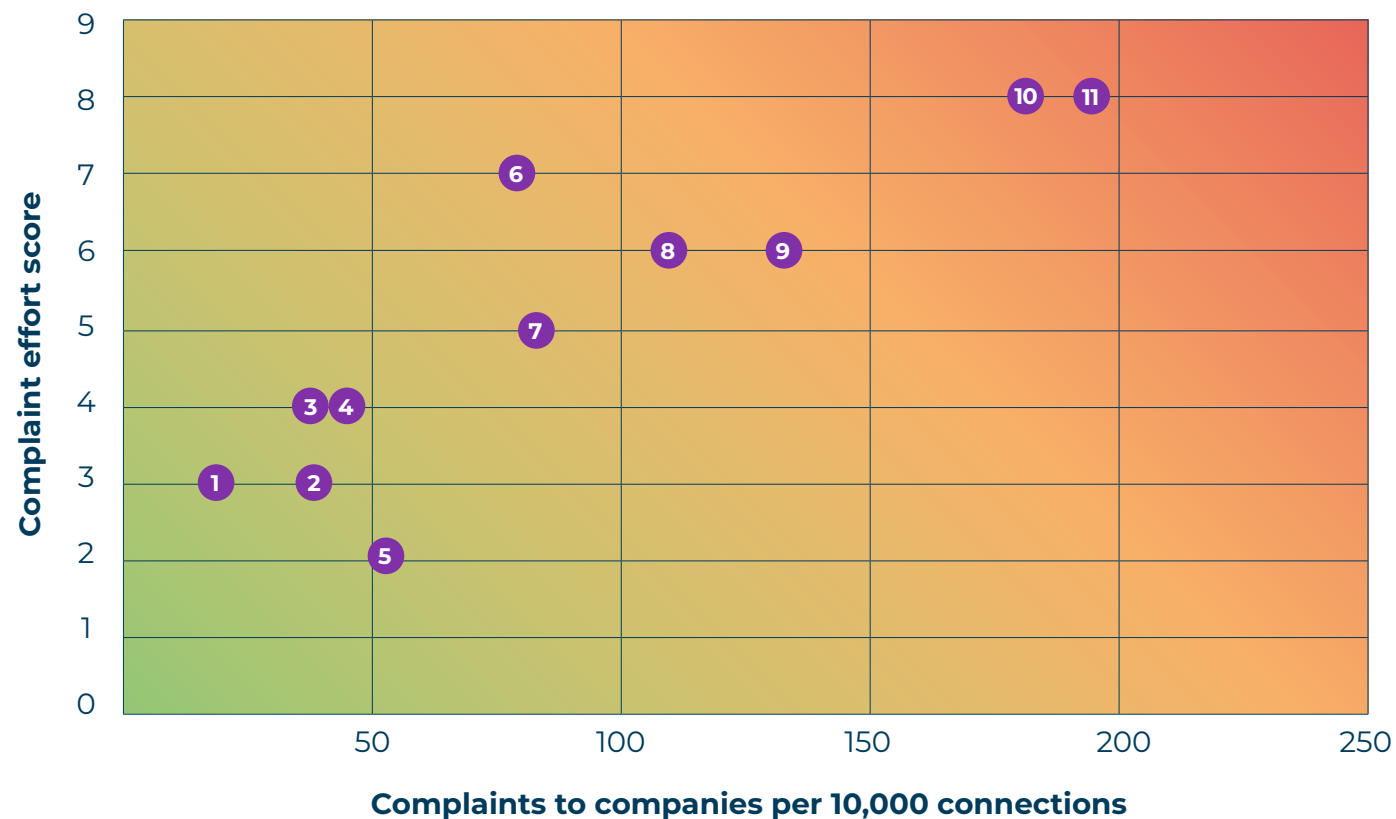
Table 1 Overall complaint performance 2025-26 - WaSCs

Company	Complaints to WaSCs per 10,000 connections	Complaint effort score ¹⁴
Anglian Water	45.8	Moderate
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water	77.5	Poor
Hafren Dyfrdwy	18.7	Moderate
Northumbrian Water	40.5	Moderate
Severn Trent Water	42.5	Moderate
South West Water	183.1	Poor
Southern Water	108.5	Weak
Thames Water	197.9	Poor
United Utilities	79.9	Weak
Wessex Water	51.5	Good
Yorkshire Water	128.5	Weak

● Poor ● Weak ● Moderate ● Good

¹⁴Appendix 1a shows how the complaint effort metric score is calculated.

Figure 23 Complaints to companies vs complaint effort in 2025-26 - WaSCs



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

Thames Water and South West Water are the two poorest performing WaSCs in 2025-26, two of the three companies that CCW named as poor performing WaSCs in 2024-25. Both companies are ranked 'poor' in both the volume of complaints their customers made directly to them and 'poor' in the complaint effort metric.

Thames Water had the highest rate of complaints made directly to the company and the highest rate of complaints escalated to CCW among WaSCs in 2025-26, when measured per 10,000 connections. Thames Water also recorded one of the highest rates of stage 2 complaints, although this measure improved compared with 2024-25.

South West Water had the second highest rate of complaints made directly to the company and the third highest rate of complaints escalated to CCW among WaSCs in 2025-26, when measured per 10,000 connections. South West Water also recorded the second highest rate of stage 2 complaints among WaSCs.

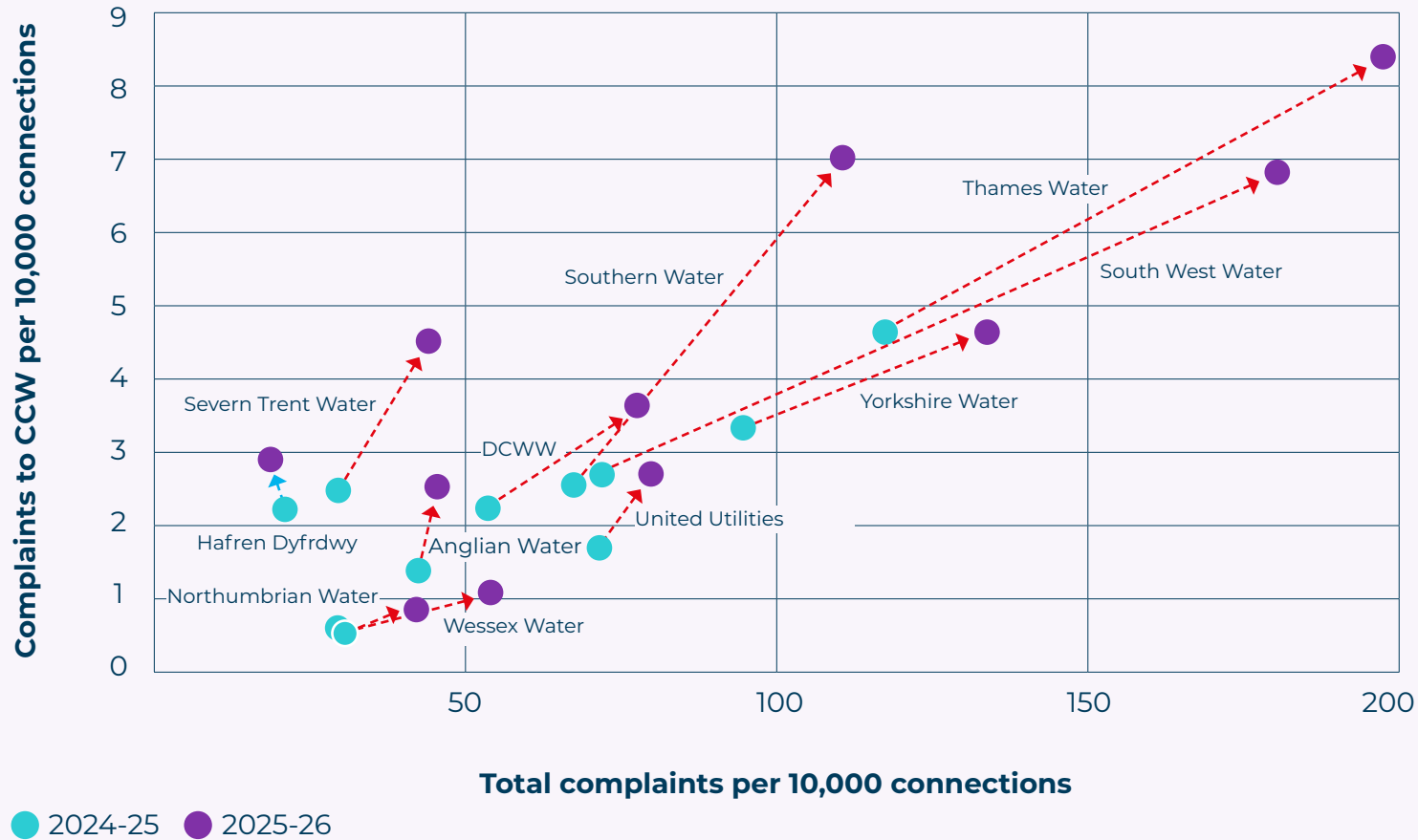
Yorkshire Water, which ranked 'poor' in both measures in 2024-25, has seen an increase in stage 1 complaints, stage 2 complaints and complaints

to CCW. But other companies worsened at a faster rate, so in the complaint effort metric Yorkshire Water has moved from the poor performer category to 'weak'.

No WaSC ranked as 'good' in both metrics, although four came close. Hafren Dyfrdwy had the lowest number of direct complaints and stage 2 complaints per 10,000 connections, but complaints to CCW kept it from being ranked 'good' in both measures. Severn Trent followed a similar pattern, ranking 'good' for direct and stage 2 complaints, but not for the complaint effort metric because of the volume of complaints reaching CCW. Northumbrian Water had the lowest proportion of customers approaching CCW and the second-lowest number of direct complaints per 10,000 connections, but its stage 2 volume prevented it from ranking 'good' in both metrics. Wessex Water had low numbers of stage 2 complaints and complaints to CCW, making it the only water and sewerage company ranked 'good' for complaint effort, but its direct complaints per 10,000 connections kept it from being 'good' across both measures.

Whilst every WaSC apart from Hafren Dyfrdwy saw an increase in complaints directly from customers, and all companies saw an increase in complaints to CCW, there were differences in the scale of the increase. To demonstrate this, we have shown the direction of change from 2024-25 to 2025-26 per company. The longer the arrow, the bigger the increase in complaints. Arrows that point further right show a larger increase in complaints made directly to the company, while arrows that point higher show a larger increase in complaints made to CCW.

Figure 24 Total complaints vs CCW complaints for WaSCs - direction of change



Thames Water, South West Water and Southern Water stand out because they experienced some of the largest increases in both measures (represented by the longest arrows). Southern Water already ranks as 'weak' for both complaint levels and complaint effort, however, this alternative view of company performance suggests that it has also experienced one of the greatest overall increases in these measures since 2024-25.

With all three companies, our complaint assessments help identify the root cause of complaints in the first instance, so the company can take action to prevent future complaints from occurring in the first place. We also consider any interactions the customer had with the company before the complaint, to see if there were opportunities earlier in the relationship to stop a problem before it happened. Looking at the case from start to finish helps companies to identify painful or difficult parts in a customer's journey, and address these to stop the same thing happening to others.

Complaints to Water-Only Companies (WOCs)

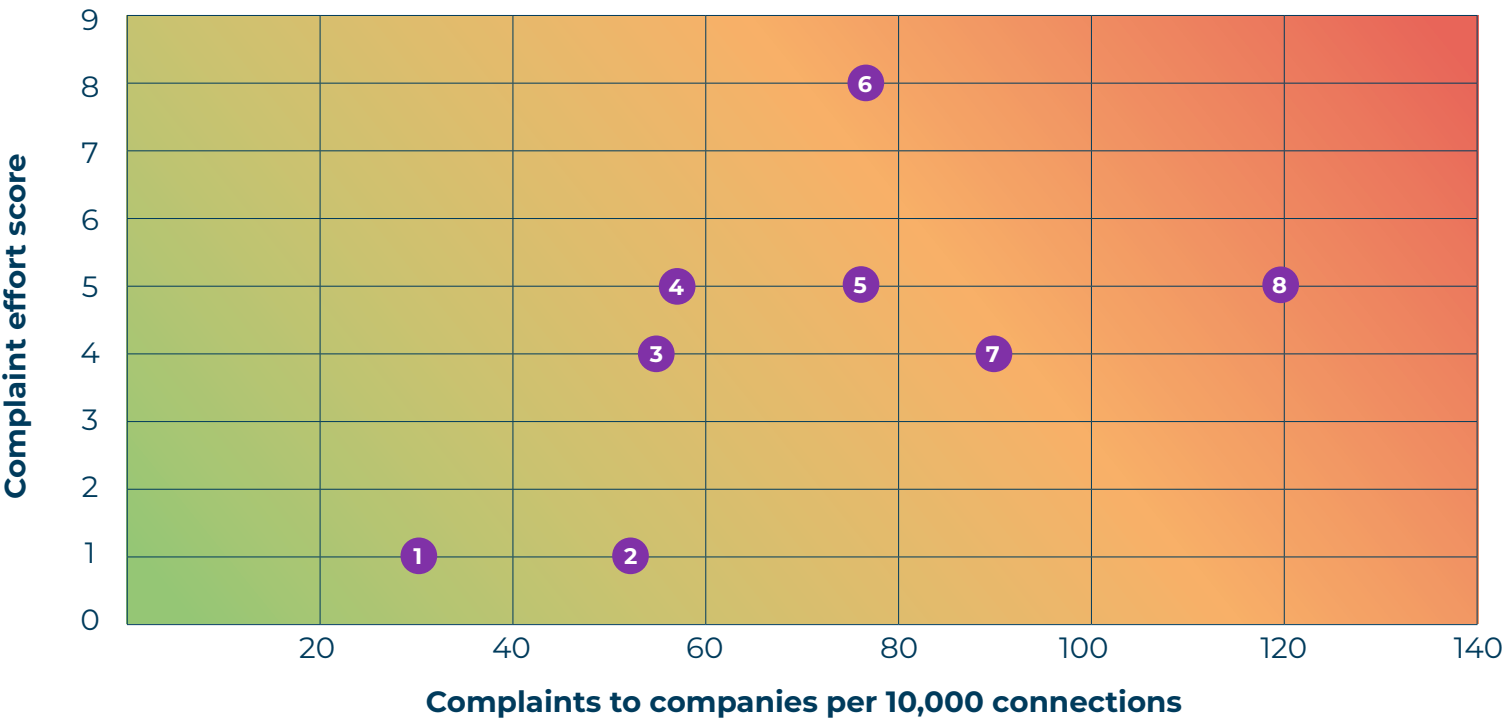
Table 2 Overall complaints performance 2025-26 - WOCs

Company	Complaints to WOCs per 10,000 connections	Complaint effort score ¹⁵
Affinity Water	119.6	Weak
Bristol Water	52.5	Good
Cambridge Water	75.0	Weak
Essex & Suffolk Water	54.9	Weak
Portsmouth Water	27.7	Good
SES Water	73.9	Poor
South East Water	89.1	Weak
South Staffs Water	58.1	Weak

● Poor ● Weak ● Moderate ● Good

¹⁵Appendix 1a shows how the complaint effort metric score is calculated.

Figure 25 Complaints to companies vs complaint effort in 2025-26 - WOCs



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

Portsmouth Water and Bristol Water both ranked as 'good' in the number of complaints they received from their customers directly and in the complaint effort metric. For Portsmouth Water, this is the second year in a row that it has generated the lowest level of complaints per 10,000 connections from its customers. It also saw a low number of stage 2 complaints and few of its customers came to CCW. Bristol Water has now been 'good' in both metrics for two years running.

No WOC ranked as poor in both measures. Affinity Water, which ranked as 'poor' in both metrics in 2024-25, now ranks as 'weak' in complaint effort. This change is largely due to stage 2 complaints increasing more sharply at other companies, which has improved Affinity Water's relative position. Its customers generated the highest volume of complaints per 10,000 connections of any WOC and a higher volume than many WaSCs. There is still work for Affinity Water to do to understand and address the causes of its customers' complaints.

SES Water was also named a poor performer in 2024-25, but this year has moved into the 'weak'

category for complaints per 10,000 connections. SES Water cannot afford to ease up on the pace of its improvements, given that it remains a poor performer in the complaint effort metric.

South East Water's performance deserves comment. In 2024-25, it ranked as 'moderate' in both metrics. In 2025-26, it generated the second highest number of complaints per 10,000 connections for a WOC, ranking 'poor'. Its stage 2 complaints per 10,000 connections are relatively low, but the volume of complaints per 10,000 customers to CCW from South East Water customers meant the company ranked as 'weak' in the complaint effort metric. The company experienced several service failures during the year, which is reflected in its worsening performance. The company's new leadership must focus on resolving service and communication issues to bring complaint numbers back to its previous above average performance and provide customers with the service standards they rightly expect.





4

Conclusion

Conclusion

44

Conclusion

The rise in complaints to companies and to CCW in 2025-26 was unprecedented.

Complaints made directly to water companies rose by 56%, from 205,853 in 2024-25 to 321,347 in 2025-26, while complaints brought to CCW rose by an astonishing 84%, from 8,235 to 15,115 - the steepest increase in household complaints CCW has recorded. This happened against a backdrop of substantial bill increases - the industry average bill rising by 26%. This matters because bills are one of the most direct ways customers judge whether their company is treating them fairly.

Billing complaints to companies rose by 72% compared with the previous year, and billing complaints to CCW rose by 97%, from 5,445 to 10,735. However, the impact of the bill increases was not confined to billing and affordability complaints. Higher bills appear to have intensified scrutiny across a much wider range of issues, including bill accuracy, issues with water meters, debt and refunds. Water complaints rose to companies by 50% and to CCW by 101%.

The root causes of complaints received by CCW suggest bill increases had four main impacts on customers in 2025-26 compared to 2024-25:

1

Looking for ways to take back control of the bill

Complaints about the option to have a meter fitted not being available (+464%), about not being able to revert to fixed charges (+146%), and about access to tariffs (+243%) all increased.

2

Believing that the bill must be incorrect

Complaints about meters needing maintenance or replacement (+2,800%), estimated bills (+176%), backdated charges and catch-up bills (+341%) and leakage allowances (+171%) all increased.

3

Disbelief at the sheer scale of the bill rises

Complaints about the bill increase itself (+54%), from consumers saying their bills had become unaffordable (+129%) and from people facing debt recovery action (+49%) increased.

4

Frustration with the service offered by the company

Complaints from people having difficulty reaching their company (+107%), companies not responding to complaints or queries (+49%) and refund issues (+70%) increased.

The rise in complaints occurred at a time when customer trust in water companies was already damaged. CCW's annual tracking survey, Water Matters 2026¹⁶, recorded a record-low trust score of 6.07 out of 10 for water companies, with only 44% of customers agreeing charges were fair, down 9% on the previous survey. Complaints reflected wider concerns about whether customers were receiving a fair deal and whether water companies were being transparent and accountable for their performance.

Customers need reliable services, clear explanations, timely action and ownership of problems. Where these basics are missing, frustration can quickly become a complaint - and where complaints are not resolved effectively, trust is damaged further.

CCW's complaint assessments provide important evidence about the quality of companies' complaint handling. They show that customers are more likely to remain dissatisfied and seek further help when companies fail to investigate issues thoroughly, explain decisions clearly or take ownership of problems. They also highlight the difference that

early, practical and empathetic intervention can make, particularly for customers facing complex issues or vulnerable circumstances.

However, CCW's assessments reinforce the wider conclusion that effective complaint handling should not be the main way customers secure fair outcomes; companies need to prevent avoidable complaints and resolve problems properly at the earliest opportunity. The proportion of complaints escalated to stage 2 fell by only around one percentage point year on year. Against a backdrop of an 84% rise in complaints to CCW, this is difficult to view as evidence of significant improvement.

There were some positives in the complaint numbers across 2025-26, although they were limited. Wastewater complaints to companies decreased by 6% compared to the previous year, but still increased to CCW by 7%. Whilst CCW saw an increase (+41%) in complaints about wastewater pipework, there was a decrease in complaints about wastewater flooding (-17%) and in environmental issues (-21%). Wastewater flooding and pollution are some of the most distressing experiences and we hope to see the decline in people needing to

complain about them continue as the water and sewerage companies continue to work on these issues.

The message from customers is clear: as costs rise so do customers' expectations. Customers are less likely to accept unclear explanations, unexpected charges or delays in resolving their issues. Confidence will only be rebuilt through visible and consistent improvement. CCW will continue to use complaints evidence to challenge poor performance and press for change, but the responsibility for restoring trust rests with water companies. Unless customers see tangible improvements in the service, support and fairness they receive, high complaint levels will remain a clear warning that the sector has not yet rebuilt customers' confidence.

¹⁶[Water Matters 2026 - CCW](#)

CCW
23 Stephenson Street
Birmingham
B2 4BH

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ccw.org.uk

