



To order any code of practice leaflet in Braille, large print, CD or on audio tape, please call **0845 717 1100**.

We also offer information leaflets on sewer flooding, protecting the environment and water efficiency in the home and garden

## How to contact us

**By telephone:**  
**0845 733 5566** (8am to 8pm weekdays, 8am to 1pm Saturdays) for billing and account enquiries

**0845 717 1100** (24 hours) for non-billing and service enquiries

**0800 393 084** - Leakline

**0800 328 7648** - Floodline

**In writing:**  
Northumbrian Water, PO Box 300,  
Durham DH1 9WQ

**By email through our website:**  
[www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk)

### **Minicom:**

A minicom text facility is available for people with speech or hearing difficulties: **0845 723 1254**

We also accept calls from RNID Typetalk

### **Language Line:**

If English is not your first language, we offer a free translation service on **0845 310 9900**

Your local, independent watchdog:

**Consumer Council for Water**  
Eighth Floor, Northgate House,  
St Augustine's Way,  
Darlington DL1 1XA

Telephone: **01325 464 222**

Lo-call: **0845 708 9367**

Fax: **01325 369 269**

Email: [northumbria@ccwater.org.uk](mailto:northumbria@ccwater.org.uk)

### **Disclosure of information**

When you contact us, all the information you give to us is stored electronically and is kept confidential unless we are required to disclose it by law or to comply with an instruction of a regulator. Your information will only be available to relevant members of our staff and our agents.

Northumbrian Water  
Abbey Road  
Pity Me  
Durham  
DH1 5FJ

[www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk)

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NORTHUMBRIAN  
WATER



Our **promise**  
to **you**

## Our promise to **you**

At Northumbrian Water, customer service is at the heart of everything we do. Our customer charter details the standards of service we guarantee to provide to you. We must meet certain standards by law, but aim to improve on many of these and include others that we believe demonstrate excellent customer service.

We believe excellent customer service is about getting it right for customers first time and every time. If you are unhappy about any part of our service, please get in touch with us so that we can deal with your concerns.

If we fail to meet a service standard we will pay you compensation of at least £20, although in some circumstances it can be more than that. The exact amounts are set out in this booklet and payments will be made automatically, unless we state that they must be claimed. Some claims need to be made in writing, and we state this in the sections where this applies. If we fail to make an automatic payment, you can write to us to claim a further £20 within three months of our failure. If you are more than six weeks behind with paying your bill and you are entitled to compensation, we will use the payment to reduce the amount you owe us, rather than paying the money to you.



## Getting in touch

We take complaints about any aspect of our service very seriously. If you make a complaint to us in writing or by email, we will reply within ten working days of receiving your complaint. If we do not then we will automatically pay you £50.

Wherever possible, we will answer telephone complaints immediately. If this is not possible, we will take your details and make sure you receive a response within ten working days. If we do not then we will automatically pay you £50.

Full details of how we deal with customer complaints can be found in our code of practice on complaints. To request a copy of this please call **0845 717 1100** or download a copy from our website at [www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk).

## Paying your bill

If you contact us by phone, in writing or by email to tell us you feel your bill is not correct, we will reply within ten working days of the date we receive your letter or phone call. If we do not then we will automatically pay you £20.

If you write and ask us to change the way you pay your bill and we cannot do this, we will reply within five working days of the date we receive your letter. If we do not then we will automatically pay you £20.

If we incorrectly issue a County Court claim against you when the Department for Work and Pensions, a debt advice agency, Social Services or the Consumer Council for Water have asked us not to, we will pay you £50. We will also withdraw the claim. This payment must be claimed in writing.

If we have issued a County Court claim and we have already received a payment from you settling your bill, we will withdraw the claim immediately and pay you £100. This payment must be claimed in writing.

If we incorrectly obtain a County Court judgment against you, we will arrange for the judgment to be set aside, pay any costs and automatically pay you £150 for any distress or inconvenience we may have caused.

Automatic payments on all of the above standards will be made within ten days of our failure to keep the standard. If we fail to make a payment to you on time, you can write to us to claim a further £20 within three months of our failure.

## Your **water** meter

In any 12 month period (April to March), we will provide you with at least one bill based on an actual meter reading. If we do not do this then we will automatically pay you £20. Please note this standard will only apply if we have access to read your meter.

Under our free meter installation policy, we will fit your meter within 90 days of receiving your application. If we fail to do this and the delay is our fault, you will pay as if you were metered from the 91<sup>st</sup> day. This means that you will not have to pay more as a result of our delay.

If you have a water meter and tell us your water supply is discoloured because of our work, we may ask you to run the water until it clears. If we do, we will credit your account with the amount equivalent to five cubic metres (5000 litres or 1100 gallons).

## Leakage

For household customers, the first time you have a high meter reading because of a leak on a water pipe within your property boundary, we may make an allowance on your bill for the lost water, as long as the leak is covered by our free repair policy.

If the leak is within your property boundary and is not covered by our repair policy, we will agree a date by which you must repair the leak. We will only give you an allowance if you repair the leak by this date. We will normally allow up to a month, but we may give you more time.

Generally, we will only give one allowance for each customer in each property. Full details of our policy and the conditions that apply can be found in our code of practice on leakage. To request a copy please call **0845 717 1100** or download a copy from our website at **[www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk)**.



## Making appointments

We will make an appointment with you either before or after 1pm, or for a two-hour time band if you ask for this. If we fail to do this, we will automatically pay you £30.

If we have made an appointment to visit you, we will give you at least 24 hours notice if we need to change the arrangements.

If we do not keep an appointment or give you at least 24 hours notice of a change, we will automatically pay you £30.

Automatic payments on the above standards will be made within ten days of our failure to keep the standard. If we fail to make a payment to you on time, you can write to us to claim a further £20 within three months of our failure.

## Water quality

If you telephone us to report a serious water quality concern that appears to be causing a gastrointestinal illness in your household, we will arrange to visit your property within four hours, or later as agreed with you. If we do not arrive within these agreed timescales, we will automatically pay you £20. When we call, we will also provide an alternative supply of water if you need one. We will let you know the results of any investigations as soon as possible.

Please note our email inbox is not monitored on a 24 hour basis. If you do have a serious water quality problem, please telephone us so we can deal with your concerns immediately.

Occasionally we may have to ask you to boil your water because the quality is lower than the required standard or we are not able to guarantee that standards will be maintained. In these cases we will work very quickly to bring the quality of the water back up to its normal high standards and then withdraw the notice. This work will usually take up to 48 hours however if it takes 72 hours or more, we will consider paying you £20.

Occasionally water supplies may be discoloured. Although this is harmless, it can stain clothes in washing machines. We appreciate this may cause you problems, should you be using appliances at the time. If it does and you let us know, we will visit you and provide you with a special detergent to help clean your laundry. If the detergent does not work, you may claim a payment to replace the damaged items.

## Blocked access

Sometimes we may need to carry out work in the road or footpath outside your home, and this may restrict access to your property. Whilst this is a necessary aspect of what we do, it may cause you inconvenience.

For household customers, if our planned non-emergency work blocks pedestrian or vehicle access to your home, we will always try to let you know before it happens.

If we have not, you may claim £20 from us.

## Water pressure

If we are aware the pressure at the boundary of your property has fallen below seven metres static head for more than one hour (sufficient to fill a ten litre bucket in one minute), and it happens twice within a 28 day period, we will pay you £25. If you suspect you fall into this category, please contact us either by telephone, email or in writing and we will investigate your claim. We will only make one payment against this service standard during any financial year (April – March).

## Water flooding

If the main living area of your property is flooded because of a problem with one of our water mains and you contact us, we will visit you to offer help and advice. As well as offering a clean-up service, we will refund your full water service charge for the year, or pay you £100, whichever is more (up to a maximum of £1000). This payment must be claimed and will be made regardless of whether or not you are covered by insurance.

Please note, if you do experience flooding of this nature, you should always contact your household insurer immediately.



## Sewer flooding

If the inside of your property is flooded from one of our sewers, you should contact us immediately, and also advise your household insurer, who will be able to provide advice about cleaning up. We will try to visit you within six hours although severe weather leading to widespread flooding may mean this is not always possible. Wherever possible we will also help you to clean up. We will refund an amount equal to your full sewerage charge for the year, or pay you £150, whichever is more (up to a maximum of £1000) for each flooding incident that happens. If we do not make a refund for internal sewer flooding within 20 working days of the flooding event, we will pay you an additional £20 (£50 if you are a business customer).

If the outside of your property is flooded from one of our sewers and you let us know, wherever possible we will help you to clean up. We will ask you to complete a flooding assessment form which helps us understand the nature of the flooding. Once you have returned this to us, we will automatically refund an amount equal to 50% of your sewerage charge for the year, or pay you £75, whichever is more, (up to a maximum of £500) for each flooding incident that happens.

If we do not make a refund for external sewer flooding within 20 working days of receiving your completed flooding assessment form, we will automatically pay you an additional £20 (£50 if you are a business customer). If your property is flooded both internally and externally, only the payment for internal flooding will apply.

Please remember that you must let us know if you have flooded. As long as we know, and after carrying out any investigations which we feel are necessary, we will automatically make these payments, whether or not you are covered by insurance.

Our standards for sewer flooding do not apply if the flooding is caused by:

- something you have done
- any fault or blockage in your own private drains or sewers
- exceptional weather conditions
- industrial action by our employees.

## Interruptions to your **water supply**

During planned maintenance work, we may sometimes need to turn off your water supply. If we turn off the water supply to your property for between one and four hours, we will let you know in writing at least 12 hours beforehand. If we turn off the water supply to your property for more than four hours, we will let you know in writing at least 48 hours beforehand. We will also let you know when we plan to turn it back on again. We will turn the water back on at the time we have said, if not before.

If we do not provide the notice set out above or do not turn your water back on within the time we say, we will automatically pay you £20 if you are a household customer (£50 if you are a business customer). During emergency work, such as a burst water main, we will not be able to warn you that your water will be off. We will do our best to let you know what is happening and, if necessary, we will provide an alternative water supply.

In most emergencies we will turn your water back on within 12 hours, unless doing this would cause even greater inconvenience, for example, loud noise from night-time repair work. If the loss of water supply was caused by a leak on one of our major water mains, it could take up to 24 hours to restore your supply. If we do not turn your water back on within these times, we will automatically pay you £20 if you are a household customer (£50 if you are a business customer). If your water is off for longer than the times mentioned we will pay you an extra £10 (£25 if you are a business customer) for any further complete periods of 24 hours that the water is off. You should receive these payments automatically and, if you do not, it may be because we did not know you were affected. If you wish to make a claim, you should do this within three months of the incident.

If we are aware of any interruption to your water supply and we do not make a payment within 20 working days, we will automatically pay you an additional £20 (£50 if you are a business customer). In any 12 month period (April to March) you experience unplanned interruptions totalling more than 18 hours, we will automatically pay you £20.

## Emergency **drought restrictions**

We will automatically pay you £20 (£50 for business customers) for each day or part day that your water supply is interrupted or cut off because of emergency drought restrictions unless Ofwat (our regulator) believes it could not be avoided.

We will only make one payment for each day your water supply is off. The most we will pay in any one year is the average water bill from the year before for homes, and the actual water bill from the year before for businesses. If your business did not pay water charges during the year before, the most we will pay is £500.

Properties that are used for both homes and businesses will be treated as homes for these standards.



## New supplies

We will send you a quotation for a new water supply connection to a new water main (on-site) within ten working days of receiving your correctly filled-in application form. For connections to one of our existing water mains, we will send you a quote within 20 working days. If we do not meet these standards, we will automatically pay you £20.

We will connect your new water supply within 21 calendar days\* of receiving your request providing that you have paid for it and our installation requirements have been met. If we do not meet this standard we will automatically pay you £25.

\* Please note this is subject to the Local Authority granting permission to excavate the public highway.

Further information about new supply requirements and our commitments to you can be found in our developers' code of practice which you can download at [www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk).

## In all our dealings with you, **we promise...**

If our service is below standard, or our activities have caused unreasonable disruption or inconvenience, we will do everything we can to put things right quickly and without fuss.

Occasionally there are circumstances beyond our control, such as severe weather conditions or the actions of someone outside our organisation, which may prevent us from providing our normal high standard of service. In these circumstances, the guarantees set out in our customer charter will not apply, although we do promise to do our best to maintain normal services or to reduce the inconvenience to you.

## Help in emergencies

There are times when you may suffer loss or damage because of a water or sewerage problem which is no-one's fault. To help out in situations like these, you can apply to our emergency fund for help. We consider each application individually and you can find out more by contacting our customer centre.

## Caring for customers who need special assistance

We have a computerised register which allows us to provide special services for our customers who need extra assistance. For example, if you need a continuous supply of water because of a medical condition, we can provide you with bottled water if there is an emergency interruption to your supply. We also provide services such as large print bills and operate a password scheme for your peace of mind. These services are free and totally confidential.

You can register with our Customer Centre. We have specially trained advisors who can visit you at home to discuss your needs. These visits are totally confidential and we can usually arrange to visit you within 48 hours of your request.

**This leaflet forms part of our code of practice for domestic customers, which provides customers with essential information about our company. All our codes are approved by Ofwat.**

Other leaflets within our code of practice are available:

- Getting answers (who to contact and how we will manage your complaint)
- Can we help you? (a range of services we offer for customers who need extra help)
- Getting water to your home
- Dealing with leaks (our code of practice on leakage, guidance on pipe ownership and our repair policy)
- Your water meter
- Paying your water bill
- Managing debt (our code of practice on debt)
- Sewerage services
- Water and sewerage watchdogs (who to contact for additional information)