

# GETTING ANSWERS

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Our Code of Practice on complaints

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## OUR CODE OF PRACTICE ON COMPLAINTS

Here at Northumbrian Water, our aim is to give you the service you expect all day, every day.

We try hard to avoid problems, but sometimes they do occur. If you do have a problem, we would like to hear from you.

If you are unhappy about our work or service and we know about it, this gives us the opportunity to put things right for you and make improvements so that other customers may benefit.

This leaflet sets out:

- How to let us know you have a complaint.
- How we will manage your complaint.
- How to take it further if you are still unhappy.
- How to get more information about our services.

Our guaranteed standards of service set out our service levels and how we will compensate you if things go wrong.

You can get a copy of this leaflet, called **Our promise to you** from our website [www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk) or by calling us on **0345 717 1100**

## LETTING US KNOW

### By telephone:

**0345 733 5566\*** for billing and account enquiries. Monday to Friday from 8.00am until 8.00pm and Saturday from 8.00am until 1.00pm.

**0345 717 1100\*** for general enquiries about water and sewerage services. Monday to Friday, from 8.00am until 8.00pm, and Saturday from 9.00am until 1.00pm. This number is also available 24 hours for emergencies.

\*Calls may be monitored and recorded in order to improve service quality and employee training.

If English is not your first language we offer a free telephone translation service. Let us know which language you require and we will arrange for an interpreter to join the call to assist.

Deaf and hard of hearing customers can contact us using Text Relay – just prefix any of our listed numbers with 18001 and a Text Relay operator will join the call.

Alternatively you can let us know the name of someone you trust who has agreed to talk to us on your behalf.

Contact us by email through our website [www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk).

**In writing:**  
Northumbrian Water PO Box 200  
Durham DH1 9WG

We take your complaints very seriously and we will be in touch, as we prefer to talk to you to try and resolve any concerns as soon as possible. If we can't contact you by telephone, we will send our response in a letter or an email.

We always aim to deal with your complaint as quickly as possible and promise to respond within a maximum of 10 working days from the date we receive it. If your complaint is more complex, we will keep you informed as we investigate in more detail. If we fail to meet this standard we promise to automatically pay you £50.

Within eight weeks of us receiving your complaint we will either:

- be able to fully resolve your complaint or
- advise you that we are still not in a position to issue our final response. We will tell you why this is and also when we expect to be able to do so.

In both of these cases we will tell you how you can contact CCW if you are unhappy with our response, or if you do not want to wait beyond eight weeks.

### **In person**

We will listen to your complaint and do our best to deal with it immediately.

We will investigate your complaint and contact you within 10 working days with our response if we cannot resolve it at the time.

### **In all cases**

We will also investigate a complaint made on your behalf by a third party and this includes family members, friends, carers or welfare associations. However we will not disclose any sensitive personal information about you without first making security checks or asking for your permission.



## MANAGING YOUR COMPLAINT

All of the customer complaints we receive are recorded on the day of receipt and stored on a computerised system. If you register a complaint, we will give you a contact name and that person will investigate your complaint and respond to you.

If your complaint relates to a billing matter which requires investigation and cannot therefore be immediately resolved, any action to recover the debt will be suspended until our investigations have been concluded and you have been informed of the outcome.

Every month, our directors receive a report on the number of complaints and the speed of our responses. We also check the quality of the responses we give and continuously try to improve the service we provide.

Our records are assessed independently by members of the Consumer Council for Water on a regular basis. Each year information is given to Ofwat and the Consumer Council for Water on the number of complaints and our speed of response. This information is published so that performance between different water companies in England and Wales can be compared.

With all complaints we welcome the opportunity to resolve any problem by telephone so we can address your concerns as quickly as possible.

Whatever the method you choose to complain, we will make an automatic payment if we fail to meet any of our promises.

Some customers receive their sewerage services from another company. If you are not sure who to contact, please call us for this information.

## TAKING IT FURTHER

### INTERNAL REVIEW

Please let us know if you are not satisfied with the response you receive.

Please call: **0345 155 0237**

Write to:  
Customer Care Review team  
Northumbrian Water  
PO Box 200  
Durham  
DH1 9WG

The members of the Customer Care Review team will not have been involved in dealing with your initial complaint and will therefore always be independent of the original investigation. They will carry out a full review of your complaint. They can override or support the original response. Either way, they will respond to you within ten working days.

### INDEPENDENT REVIEW

We believe that an independent review is an essential safeguard for our customers, and constructive to improvements in our service. On any occasion when we are unable to resolve a complaint to your satisfaction, you can refer it to the Consumer Council for Water, an independent organisation which acts as a watchdog on your behalf. It will investigate your complaint through its own procedures and ask us why we took the decisions we did – and inform you accordingly.

The Consumer Council for Water offers independent advice. You can visit its website at **[www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk)**, call **0300 034 2222** or write to:

**The Consumer Council for Water**  
**c/o 1st Floor**  
**Victoria Square House**  
**Birmingham B2 4AJ**

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 8.30am until 5.00pm.

The Consumer Council for Water makes sure consumers' complaints are being handled promptly and efficiently.

### GOING TO ARBITRATION

If your complaint is about any of the following matters, it may have to be decided by an arbitrator:

- Conditions for installing a meter.
- Regulations for preventing contamination or waste.
- Regulations on water fittings.
- Compensation for streetworks.

We offer a scheme through the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, which allows an independent arbitrator to make a decision quickly. Please contact us if you would like more information on this process.

## WATER AND SEWERAGE WATCHDOGS

Water is a regulated industry. This means that there are a number of independent organisations that oversee the activities of water and sewerage companies. They have a direct influence on every area of our business from the quality of water we supply, to the amount we charge our customers.

Acting as watchdogs, they make sure that we do our job well, that we care for our customers and that we meet rigorous standards, both for the quality of our supply and for the service we provide. In short, they work in your interests.

At Northumbrian Water, we aim to exceed the standards set by the watchdogs.

### OFWAT

Ofwat is the economic regulator of the water and sewerage industry in England and Wales. It sets the price limits for each company, but also protects and monitors the standards of service you receive. It also expects companies to improve their services by becoming more efficient.

The address and telephone number is:

Ofwat  
City Centre Tower  
7 Hill Street  
Birmingham  
B5 4UA

Tel: 0121 644 7500

Fax: 0121 644 7559

Email: [mailbox@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mailbox@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk)

Ofwat does not generally handle complaints from individual customers. Please contact us in the first instance, and then if you are still dissatisfied, you can contact the Consumer Council for Water, using the contact details on the previous page.

A limited number of types of complaint are dealt with by Ofwat, rather than by the Consumer Council for Water. For these types of complaint, you should still contact us in the first instance, but if you remain dissatisfied you may decide to submit a complaint to Ofwat.

These complaints include:

- Those about our powers to lay pipes on private land.
- Concerns that we are allegedly breaking our licence conditions or our main water supply or sewerage duties.
- Complaints about anti-competitive behaviour under the Competition Act 1998, for example colluding on pricing or bidding for contracts.

## DISPUTE DECISIONS

Ofwat can also decide on certain disputes but you should still contact the Consumer Council for Water first, because it may be able to resolve your complaint more quickly on an informal basis. If it is not successful then it will consider referring the complaint to Ofwat for formal resolution. Ofwat will then conduct a formal investigation of the dispute and we must follow their decision. These disputes include the following:

- A customer's right to a payment or credit under the Guaranteed Standards Scheme.
- The charges and conditions set by us for making connections to water mains.
- The terms and conditions for a non-domestic supply.
- The need for a customer's property to have a separate service pipe.
- The charges and conditions for providing a water main (requisition).
- The terms and conditions for the adoption of a self-laid main.
- The charges or disconnection costs that must be paid to us before a business customer's supply is reconnected.
- A refusal to allow you to pay by measured charge because a meter is not practical or is unreasonably expensive to install.
- Appeals on the transfer of private sewers and pumping stations.
- A refusal to allow private sewers and drains to be connected to public sewers, or a requirement to inspect the drain or sewer before allowing a connection.
- The costs and security we ask for to connect premises to a sewer.
- The charges and conditions for providing a sewer (requisition).
- A proposal or refusal to adopt sewers or sewage-disposal works, or about the conditions in an adoption agreement.
- The position or suitability of a drain or sewer to replace an existing private drainage system which we consider to be unsuitable.
- The effectiveness of an alternative sewer that has been provided to replace an existing one that is due to be closed.
- A requirement that a proposed drain or sewer is built so it can become part of a general sewerage system.

Ofwat also decides appeals from occupiers of trade premises who are not happy with a refusal or the conditions set by us about putting trade effluent into the public sewer.

## WATRS REDRESS SCHEME

If your complaint remains unresolved after it has gone through all the stages of our complaints procedure and has been reviewed by CCWater, you may be eligible to take your concerns to WATRS, the Water Industry Redress Scheme who can provide an independent binding decision. Details on how and when to apply can be found at [www.watrs.org](http://www.watrs.org). Further details can also be found on our website at [www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk).



## **DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE (DWI)**

The Drinking Water Inspectorate makes sure that water companies supply water that is safe to drink and meets the standards which have been established for drinking water quality. Every day we test tap water. DWI inspectors independently check these tests and audit our laboratories. They also inspect those aspects of water operations which ensure drinking water is safe at all times. The reports are available from the DWI website at **[www.dwi.gov.uk/about/annual-report](http://www.dwi.gov.uk/about/annual-report)**.

The Government has set legal standards for drinking water in the Water Quality Regulations. Most of these standards come directly from European law and are based on World Health Organisation guidelines. The UK has additional standards to safeguard the already high quality of water in England and Wales. These standards include wide safety margins covering bacteria, chemicals - such as nitrates and pesticides, metals and even the look and taste of water.

Further information can be obtained from:  
**Drinking Water Inspectorate**  
**Area 7e**  
**9 Millbank**  
**c/o Nobel House**  
**17 Smith Square**  
**London**  
**SW1P 3JR**

Telephone: 0300 068 6400  
Email: **[dwi.enquiries@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dwi.enquiries@defra.gsi.gov.uk)**  
Website: **[www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk)**







## **ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (EA)**

The Environment Agency is responsible for the control of pollution in rivers, underground waters and in coastal waters, flood defence, fisheries and navigation. The EA also monitors air pollution and waste management.

The EA is a public body that controls the amount of water we can take from rivers, underground sources and other inland waters. It also oversees the strategy for maintaining and developing future water resources to ensure a fair balance between the environment and the needs of water customers.

The contact details for the EA are:

**National Customer Contact Centre**  
**PO Box 544**  
**Rotherham**  
**S60 1BY**

General enquiry line: **03708 506 506**  
(Monday to Friday from 8.00am until 6.00pm).

Emergency hotline: **0800 807 060**  
(freephone).

Floodline: **0345 988 1188**

Email:  
**[enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)**

## FINDING OUT MORE

This leaflet forms part of our Code of Practice for domestic customers, which provides customers with essential information about our company. Our Code of Practice is approved by Ofwat.

Other leaflets within our Code of Practice are available:

- **Our promise to you** (our service level and how we compensate you if things go wrong).
- **Our sewerage services.**
- **Managing debt** (our Code of Practice on debt).
- **Dealing with leaks** (our Code of Practice on leakage, guidance on pipe ownership and our repair policy).
- **Extra Care - can we help you?**
- **Your water meter** (a guide for domestic customers).
- **Getting water to your home.**

To order any Code of Practice leaflet in Braille, large print or on CD, please call 0345 717 1100.

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







Northumbrian Water  
Abbey Road  
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[www.nwl.co.uk](http://www.nwl.co.uk)

June 2020