



NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER



Getting **answers**



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, **Our promise to you** from our website **www.nwl.co.uk** or by calling us on **0845 717 1100**.

Letting us know

By telephone

Call **0845 733 5566*** (8.00am until 8.00pm weekdays and 8.00am until 1.00pm on Saturdays) about any aspect of your bill.

Call **0845 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.

We offer a free telephone translation service if English is not your first language. Just tell us which language you speak and we will arrange for an interpreter to join the call.

Deaf and hard of hearing customers can contact us from a textphone using the Text Relay service. To make a call dial **18001** from your text phone, followed by any of our listed numbers and a Text Relay operator will join the call.

Wherever possible we will answer telephone complaints immediately. If this is not possible, we will take your details and respond to you within ten working days.

If we do not meet this target, then we will automatically pay you £50.

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

In writing

Please write to:

**Northumbrian Water
PO Box 200
Durham
DH1 9WG**

On the web

www.nwl.co.uk

If you send us a letter or email, please give us your name and address, daytime telephone number if you have one and if possible, the customer number shown on your bill.

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 meet this target, then we will automatically pay you £50.

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 ten working days with our response if we cannot resolve it at the time.

In all cases

We will 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.

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

However 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.



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 telephone complaint or make a complaint in person, 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 relevant recovery action 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 response. 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 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.

Taking it further

Internal review

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

Please call: **0845 717 1100**

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 can be contacted at www.ccwater.org.uk.

Tel: **01325 728 034**

Lo-call: **08457 089 367**

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 meet and where possible, 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.

Their 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**

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.

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.

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 tap water is tested by the water companies. DWI inspectors independently check these tests and audit water company laboratories. They also inspect that the 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.

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

Website: 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: **0845 988 1188**

Email: 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. All of our Codes of Practice are approved by the Office of Water Services (Ofwat).

Other leaflets within our Code of Practice are available:

- **Our promise to you** (our service level and how we will compensate you if things go wrong).
- **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.**
- **Our sewerage services.**

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

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

Northumbrian Water
Abbey Road
Pity Me
Co Durham
DH1 5FJ

www.nwl.co.uk

August 2013