



Albion Water

Complaints procedure

Extract from the
customer code of practice

Customer services
Albion Water Ltd
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Herts AL5 2SP

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INTRODUCTION

This Complaints Procedure provides information on:

- the Company's definition of a complaint;
- arrangements for receiving, handling and registering complaints;
- compensation;
- arrangements for reviewing a case if customers are dissatisfied with the way in which their complaints have been handled previously;
- monitoring and analysis of complaints; and
- confidentiality.

The Procedure is supported fully by staff training, appropriate internal Company documentation and any contractual arrangements with third parties.

Procedural Steps

Under Sections 29 and 33 of the Competition and Services (Utilities) Act 1992, Albion Water has produced a Complaints Procedure for dealing with complaints from customers or potential customers.

There are three levels for investigating and responding to complaints within the Procedure:

Level 1

You will receive a response from an employee working in one of our complaints teams.

Level 2

If you are dissatisfied with our first response, you can ask for a senior manager to review your complaint and the way we have handled it.

Level 3

If you are still dissatisfied after having had a response from our Customer Service Representatives and a Senior Manager, you can ask the independent Consumer Council for Water (address below) to investigate your complaint.

The full Complaints Procedure follows, setting out how we will handle complaints, a summary of this will be sent along with our replies to complaints.

COMPLAINTS

1. Definition of complaints

- 1.1. A complaint is defined as any contact with the Company by a customer or potential customer in which dissatisfaction is expressed.
- 1.2. A contact will be defined as a complaint if it expresses dissatisfaction with the services provided by the Company regardless of whether the complaint is made on behalf of another party or the person making the complaint does not pay charges to the Company.

2. Anonymous complaints

- 2.1. Complaints which are made anonymously will be considered carefully and action taken where it is warranted. Anonymous complaints will not be recorded by the Company for reporting purposes.

3. Receipt of complaints

- 3.1. Customers will be asked to direct complaints to our Customer Service Department in the first instance.
- 3.2. Full details of how to contact us with a complaint will be sent to customers annually.
- 3.3. Telephone numbers and the address to contact the Company's Customer Service Department about accounts or service issues are:

Accounts issues

Our Accounts Helpline can be contacted by telephone on **0845 604 2355**

Other Customer Service Issues

Our Service Helpline, for all other customer service issues, can be contacted on **0845 604 2355**

By email

customerservices@albionwater.co.uk

Alternatively, if you need to contact us in writing about an accounts or customer service issue, please write to:

Albion Water Limited, Customer Services, 78 High Street, Harpenden, Herts, AL5 2SP

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4. Complaints made in person

- 4.1. Customers are encouraged to make a prior appointment if they wish to speak to a named employee or manager although every attempt will be made to meet a customer's wishes when visiting in person.

5. Complaints made by telephone

- 5.1. Telephone calls will be answered promptly. However it may take longer to answer a call in an emergency situation when a lot of customers are telephoning us so we have to ask customers to be patient.
- 5.2. Employees will give their names when answering telephone calls to provide customers with a point of reference should further contact be necessary.
- 5.3. If the employee who answers a telephone call cannot deal with the complaint, the call and details of the complaint will be passed to someone who can deal with it effectively. If the appropriate person is not available immediately, that person will telephone the customer. Where this is unlikely to be the same day, the customer will be notified of this as soon as possible.
- 5.4. If a customer wishes to speak to a named employee or a senior manager who is not available immediately, arrangements will be made for the call to be returned.
- 5.5. If a complaint made by telephone requires a site visit or other investigation the Company will aim to provide a full written response within ten working days. Wherever possible, in cases such as a blocked sewer where flooding is imminent, an employee or contractor will be on site addressing the problem within four hours of the telephone call being received.

6. Written complaints

- 6.1. If requested, the Company will send an acknowledgement of receipt of a written complaint on the day it is received.
- 6.2. The Company guarantees to provide a substantive response to all written complaints within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. In appropriate cases the Company will provide guidance as to how a complaint may be progressed where it cannot be resolved immediately.
- 6.3. If the Company fails to reply within 10 working days a cheque for £30 will be sent to the customer automatically (unless the customer has owed the Company money for more than six weeks or is in arrears with an instalment facility in which case £30 will be credited to that customer's account for sewerage services. The customer will be informed of this).
- 6.4. In the case of a complex complaint which may involve the Company in discussions and negotiations with other parties, the Company will keep the customer informed of progress at least monthly.
- 6.5. There are exceptions to the requirement to make a payment, and these are:
 - (a) the customer informs the company that they don't wish to pursue the complaint
 - (b) industrial action by the company's employees make it impractical to despatch a reply within the relevant period
 - (c) the act or default of a person other than the company's representative made it impractical to despatch a reply within the relevant period
 - (d) the complaint was not sent to the address notified in writing by the company to its customers as the appropriate address for complaints of that nature
 - (e) the complaint was frivolous or vexatious, or
 - (f) the company reasonably considered a visit to be necessary, but severe weather made it impracticable to make the visit

7. Handling of complaints

- 7.1. All complaints will be dealt with courteously, fairly, efficiently and as simply as possible.
- 7.2. Where it is in the Company's power to do so, the cause of the complaint will be put right as quickly as possible. If the Company is not responsible for the cause of the complaint a full explanation of why it cannot help will be given together with suggestions as to who the customer should contact for assistance.
- 7.3. It may not be possible to remedy some problems immediately. Wherever possible in these cases the Company will take action to reduce the effect the problem has and keep the customer informed of action to eliminate the problem in the longer term.
- 7.4. Complaints will be overseen by one of our complaints handling teams in our Customer Service Department. Staff who deal with complaints have undergone specific training in complaints handling and the Company's procedures and policies for dealing with customers who wish to register a complaint. Regular training in complaints handling is provided for employees.
- 7.5. A response to a complaint will include:-
 - Thanking the customer for contacting the Company.
 - An apology where the Company is at fault.
 - Explanation of all matters raised by the customer, including:
 - an explanation of the cause of the problem, where appropriate;
 - a description of the action which has been taken to overcome the problem; or
 - a description of the action which the Company will be taking together with timescales for that action; or
 - a description of the action which has been taken to reduce the problem together with an explanation of further action planned to resolve the problem ultimately and a commitment to keep the customer informed of progress; or

- a full explanation of why the Company is not able to satisfy the customer's requirements or expectations.
- Advice on who to contact where responsibility for the problem does not lie with the Company.
- A named contact and telephone number for further enquiries where this is appropriate.

8. Complaints about employees

- 8.1. A complaint about an employee of Albion Water will be reviewed and handled by a Manager or Director senior to the person about whom the complaint has been made.
- 8.2. In line with general Company policy not to discuss publicly matters relating to individual members of staff, any disciplinary action taken by the Company in response to such a complaint will not be disclosed to the complainant.

9. Redress

- 9.1. If the Company fails to provide a customer with a service which it guarantees, financial redress will be made in accordance with the levels set out in its Guaranteed Standards Scheme. Details of these standards, periodically updated, are contained within the Occupier Manual.
- 9.2. Where a complaint involves a matter not covered by the Guaranteed Standards Scheme recompense will be considered taking into account the cause of the problem and loss suffered.
- 9.3. The Company may make an ex-gratia payment or provide other redress where an immediate remedy is not available for a problem or where worry or distress has been caused.
- 9.4. In certain cases, especially those where a customer alleges specific loss or damage, it may be necessary to ask the customer to provide the Company with full details, together with receipts for any expense incurred.

10. Registering and monitoring of complaints

- 10.1. All written complaints will be registered by the Company on the day that they are received. Where the complaint needs to be directed to another office for investigation it will be transferred there on the day it is received.
- 10.2. In registering a written complaint the Company will record the substance of the complaint; any special circumstances relating to the customer; whether a Guaranteed Service Standard is involved; and the date on which a reply is due to be sent as well as details of the person making the complaint.
- 10.3. Relevant managers will monitor complaints not answered within five days to ensure that target response times are met.

11. Telephone complaints and complaints made in person

- 11.1. Telephone complaints and complaints made in person normally will be recorded on the Company's customer contact system as they are received. However in an emergency situation it may be necessary to register the complaint at a later stage.
- 11.2. Relevant managers will monitor complaints not answered within five days to ensure that target response times are met.

12. Complaints from customers for whom English is not their first language

12.1. The Company will always try to deal with a customer for whom English is not their first language in a way which makes communication easy. The arrangements necessary to enable this may mean that it takes longer to handle these complaints.

13. Dissatisfied customers

13.1. Where a customer is dissatisfied with the way in which the Company has handled a complaint, or action it has taken to resolve a problem, the case will be reviewed by the senior manager responsible for the area of the business associated with the complaint.

13.2. If the relevant senior manager has been involved in a case previously the review will be carried out by a Director of the Company to ensure an independent review. Both senior functional managers and the Director are empowered to take any action necessary to resolve the matter under review with the customer and are expected to do so by the Company.

13.3. A substantive response will be sent within 10 working days. A £30 payment will be made automatically for failures to meet this target.

14. Priority Services Customers

14.1. We recognise that complaining in writing may not be possible for all of our customers. Where a customer is dissatisfied but not able to write to explain why, we will make arrangements either to telephone or to visit to take details. Where appropriate we will send a written note of the details we have recorded to confirm that they reflect accurately what we have been told.

14.2. Customers requiring our assistance with registering a complaint should call **0845 604 2355** and ask for our Priority Needs Complaints Service.

14.3. Only when we know that a customer is satisfied with what we have recorded will we begin formally to review the complaint. A response will then be made in an appropriate format within 10 working days. This may be by telephone or a further visit but where we do this we will always send written confirmation afterwards.

15. The Consumer Council for Water (CCWater)

15.1. In the event that a customer remains dissatisfied after a senior functional manager has reviewed her or his complaint the matter may be referred to the Consumer Council for Water, the independent customer watchdog for the area.

15.2. CCWater is fully independent of the Company. A complaint may be referred to it at any time but usually it will not begin its own investigations into a complaint until the Company has had the opportunity to resolve it.

The address and telephone number for the local area Consumer Council for Water is:

Consumer Council for Water
1st Floor, Victoria Square House, Victoria Square
Birmingham
B2 4AJ
Telephone: 0121 345 1017
Lo-call: 08457 023093
e-mail: central@ccwater.org.uk
Office hours: Mon to Fri 8:30 to 4:30

16. Legal redress

16.1. In some cases a customer has a legal right to refer a problem either to arbitration, or to the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat) for determination, or to the Courts. Where the Company cannot reach agreement with the customer in such cases it will ensure that it notifies the customer of their right to refer the matter to another body.

16.2. Matters which may be referred elsewhere include

- Financial conditions for sewer requisition.
- Extensions to the period within which a sewer must be provided after requisition or the places at which private drains and sewers connect with the requisitioned sewer.
- Adoptions of sewers and sewage disposal works.
- Conditions for the connection of a drain to a public sewer.
- Requirement that a proposed drain or sewer be constructed so as to form part of the general drainage system.
- Alterations to the drainage system of premises.
- Closure and prohibition of use of a public sewer.
- The Company's exercise of its powers on private land.

16.3. Further information on arbitration is included in the Company's Code of Practice.

17. Analysis of complaints and performance

17.1. A monthly report on types of complaints received and the Company's performance in responding to them is reviewed by the Board. This information will be used to identify areas of service and policy which need to be reviewed and action which needs to be taken to improve services to customers.

17.2. The Company will undertake regular quality audits of the way in which complaints have been handled. The quality audit may involve customer research.

17.3. Independent audits of the way the Company handles complaints will also be undertaken at the Company's office by Members of CCWater. Its reports on its audits will be addressed to, and reviewed by, the Chief Executive.

18. Confidentiality

18.1. All information held about a customer will be treated in strict confidence. Access to information by employees will be on a "need to know" basis only. Similarly information relating to individual employees and their actions will be treated as confidential.

18.2. Relevant provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to information held by the Company. A disciplinary offence may be committed if an employee releases information protected by the Act.

19. Contact Details

Albion's contact details are set out in clause 3.3 above.

Please note that complaints relating to the provision of water services should be addressed to Portsmouth Water whose contact details will be shown on your water supply bill and, for convenience, are reproduced in Section X of the Scheme of Charge.

