

# EXTRACT FROM OUR CODE OF PRACTICE - COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

**Albion Water Limited**

**[www.albionwater.co.uk](http://www.albionwater.co.uk)**

## INTRODUCTION

This complaints procedure provides information on:

- our definition of a complaint;
- arrangements for receiving, handling and registering complaints;
- compensation;
- arrangements for reviewing a case if you are dissatisfied with the way in which your complaints have been handled previously;
- monitoring and analysis of complaints; and
- Confidentiality.

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

### Procedural steps

Under Sections 29 and 33 of the Competition and Services (Utilities) Act 1992, we have 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 CCWater (address in section 19 below) to investigate your complaint, if you are still dissatisfied after CCWater have investigated you can refer the issue to WATRS (address in section 19 below).

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

### Definition of complaints

- 1.1. A complaint is defined as any contact with us by a customer or potential customer in which an allegation is made that any action, or inaction, or any service provided by us has fallen below his or her expectation.
- 1.2. A contact will be defined as a complaint if you express dissatisfaction with the services provided by us regardless of whether the complaint is made on behalf of another party or the person making the complaint does not pay charges us.

### Anonymous complaints

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

### Receipt of complaints

- 1.4. You are asked to direct complaints to our Customer Service Department in the first instance.
- 1.5. Full details of how to contact us with a complaint will be sent to you annually.
- 1.6. The telephone number and the address to contact our customer service team about accounts or service issues are:

#### *Accounts and Customer Service Issues*

Our team can be contacted by telephone on **03300 242020**

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

Albion Water Limited, Customer Services, Harpenden Hall, Southdown Road,  
Harpenden, Herts, AL5 1TE

or email to: [complaints@albionwater.co.uk](mailto:complaints@albionwater.co.uk)

### Complaints made in person

- 4.1. You are encouraged to make a prior appointment if you wish to speak to a named employee or manager although every attempt will be made to meet your wishes when visiting in person.

### 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 you to be patient.
- 5.2. Employees will give their names when answering telephone calls to provide you 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 you later. Where this is unlikely to be the same day, you will be notified of this as soon as possible.

- 5.4. If you wish 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 we will aim to provide a full written response within ten working days.
- 5.6. Wherever possible, in cases such as a blocked sewer where flooding is imminent, or when water supply has completely failed, an employee or contractor will be on site addressing the problem within four hours of the telephone call being received.

## Written complaints

- 6.1. If requested, we will send an acknowledgement of receipt of a written complaint on the day it is received.
- 6.2. We guarantee to provide a substantive response to all written complaints within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint. In appropriate cases we will provide guidance as to how a complaint may be progressed where it cannot be resolved immediately.
- 6.3. If we fail to reply within 10 working days a cheque for £30 will be sent to you automatically (unless you have owed us money for more than six weeks or are in arrears with an instalment facility in which case £30 will be credited to your account. You will be informed of this).
- 6.4. In the case of a complex complaint which may involve us in discussions and negotiations with other parties, then we will keep you informed of progress at least monthly.
- 6.5. There are exceptions to the requirement to make a payment, and these are:
  - (a) you inform us that you don't wish to pursue the complaint
  - (b) industrial action by our employees make it impractical to despatch a reply within the relevant period
  - (c) the act or default of a person other than our 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 us to our 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

## 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 our power to do so, the cause of the complaint will be put right as quickly as possible. If we are not responsible for the cause of the complaint a full explanation of why we cannot help will be given together with suggestions as to who you should contact for assistance.
- 7.3. It may not be possible to remedy some problems immediately. Wherever possible in these cases we will take action to reduce the effect the problem has and keep you 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 team. Staff who deal with complaints have undergone specific training in complaints handling and our 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 you for contacting us.
  - An apology where we are at fault.

- Explanation of all matters raised by you, 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 we 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 you informed of progress; or
  - A full explanation of why we are not able to satisfy your requirements or expectations.
  - Advice on who to contact where responsibility for the problem does not lie with us.
  - A named contact and telephone number for further enquiries where this is appropriate.

## Complaints about employees

- 8.1. A complaint about an employee of Albion 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 our general policy not to discuss publicly matters relating to individual members of staff, any disciplinary action taken by us in response to such a complaint will not be disclosed to the complainant.

## Redress

- 9.1. If we fail to provide you with a service which it guarantees, financial redress will be made in accordance with the levels set out in our Guaranteed Standards Scheme. Details of these standards, periodically updated, are contained within the Code of Practice.
- 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. We 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 you allege specific loss or damage, it may be necessary to ask you to provide us with full details, together with receipts for any expense incurred.

## Registering and monitoring of complaints

- 10.1. All written complaints will be registered by us 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 we 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.

## Telephone complaints and complaints made in person

- 11.1. Telephone complaints and complaints made in person normally will be recorded on our 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.

## Complaints from customers for whom English is not their first language

- 12.1. We 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.

## Dissatisfied customers

- 13.1. Where a customer is dissatisfied with the way in which we have 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 Albion 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.
- 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.

## Customers with special requirements

- 14.1. We recognise that complaining in writing may not be possible for all of our customers. Where you are dissatisfied but are 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 **03300 242020** and ask for our Special Requirements Complaints Service.
- 14.3. Only when we know that you are 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.

## The consumer council for water (ccwater)

- 15.1. In the event that you remain dissatisfied after a senior manager has reviewed her or his complaint the matter may be referred to the CCWater, the independent customer watchdog for the area.
- 15.2. CCWater is independent of us. A complaint may be referred to it at any time but usually it will not begin its own investigations into a complaint until we have had the opportunity to resolve it.  
The address and telephone number for the local area CCWater is:

CCWater  
c/o 1<sup>st</sup> Floor,  
Victoria Square House,  
Victoria Square  
Birmingham  
B2 4AJ

**Telephone:** 0300 034 2222

**e-mail:** You can email via the CCWater website at [www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk)

**Office hours:** Mon to Fri 8:30 to 4:30

If you remain dissatisfied following CCWater's efforts to resolve your complaint, you have the right to refer your complaint to the Water Redress Scheme known as WATRS. WATRS is a voluntary alternative dispute resolution scheme to help address the very small number of customer complaints that remain unresolved. WATRS, is designed to provide an independent, impartial and easy to use alternative to going to Court or a Tribunal.

You can make an application, free of charge, via WATRS website [www.watrs.org](http://www.watrs.org) or you can ask for an application form to be sent to you [info@watrs.org](mailto:info@watrs.org). Guidance notes are available on the website or you can ask for a copy to be sent to you by telephoning 0207 520 3801. Their address is:

WATRS  
70 Fleet Street  
London  
EC4Y 1EU

We have signed up to the scheme's commitments which are set out below. A full copy of the Scheme Rules can be found here [www.watrs.org/commitments](http://www.watrs.org/commitments).

Commitment to:

1. Provide WATRS free of charge to customers;
2. Support the principles set out in the ADR Specification;
3. Respect the independence of WATRS
4. Be bound by decision of the WATRS' adjudicator if accepted by customer and to implement decision as required by Scheme Rules;
5. Co-operate with and have due regard to the recommendations of the ADR Panel
6. Provide accurate and reliable information to and co-operate with the WATRS' adjudicators;

#### 15.3. What type of complaint can be referred to WATRS?

Only disputes relating to the following apply:

Bills, payment, collections and debt recovery

Metering

Water supply services

Wastewater/sewerage services

Development and new supplies

## Legal redress

- 16.1. In some cases you have 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 we cannot reach agreement with you in such cases we will ensure that we notify you of your right to refer the matter to another body.
- 16.2. Matters which may be referred elsewhere include
  - Financial conditions for water supply or sewerage requisition.
  - Entitlement to a free meter
  - Conditions for disconnecting and reconnecting non-domestic supplies
  - 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 water mains, 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.
  - Our exercise of entry powers on private land.
- 16.3. Further information on arbitration is included in our Code of Practice.

## Analysis of complaints and performance

- 17.1. A regular report on types of complaints received and our 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. We 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 we handle complaints will also be undertaken at our office by CCWater. Its reports on its audits will be addressed to, and reviewed by, our Chief Executive.

## Confidentiality

- 18.1. All information held about you 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 us. A disciplinary offence may be committed if an employee releases information protected by the Act.

## CONTACT DETAILS

Our contact details are set out below.

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Please note that, for customers with one of the service codes above complaints relating to the provision of water services should be addressed to the incumbent whose contact details will be shown on your water supply bill and, for convenience, are reproduced in your Charges Scheme.

## ALBION WATER LIMITED

Emergency Helpline: **0800 917 5819**

Customer Service Helpline: **03300 242020**

Our Customer Service Helpline is open Monday to Friday from 8:30am until 5:30pm.

If you want to write to us about any customer service or billing issue, please use:  
**Albion Water Limited, Customer Services, Harpenden Hall, Southdown Road, Harpenden, Herts, AL5 1TE**

Our website - [www.albionwater.co.uk](http://www.albionwater.co.uk) - contains customer information and email addresses if you wish to contact us electronically.

## THE WATER SERVICES REGULATION AUTHORITY (OFWAT)

Ofwat  
Centre City Tower  
7 Hill Street  
Birmingham  
B5 4UA

Telephone: 0121 644 7500  
E-mail: [mailbox@ofwat.gov.uk](mailto:mailbox@ofwat.gov.uk)

## THE CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR WATER

CCWater  
c/o 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Victoria Square House,  
Victoria Square  
Birmingham  
B2 4AJ

Telephone: 0300 034 2222  
e-mail: You can email via the CCWater website at [www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk)

Office hours: Mon to Fri 8:30 to 4:30

## WATER REDRESS SCHEME (WATRS)

WATRS  
70 Fleet Street  
London  
EC4Y 1EU

Telephone: 0207 520 3801  
e-mail: [info@watrs.org](mailto:info@watrs.org)

## CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU (CAB)

To find your local CAB please contact the central CAB using the contact details listed below.

Myddelton House,  
115-123 Pentonville Road,  
London,  
N1 9LZ

Telephone: 03444 111 444  
<http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>