

an **UNLIMITED** agency

Customer
Licence
Condition
Research

Research stimulus

WAL
NUT

The human understanding agency.

Guidance

Putting things right: Action 1, Guidance A

The water company provides appropriate support when things go wrong and helps to put things right.

- Companies should proactively resolve issues as quickly as they can, considering the seriousness of the incident, how many customers are affected and in what ways they are affected.
- Companies should limit the impact of incidents on customers as appropriate (for example through providing alternative water during sustained outages).
- During incidents, companies should provide regular updates to customers via appropriate channels during and following incidents.

Putting things right: Action 1, Guidance B

The water company provides appropriate support when things go wrong and helps to put things right.

This should include:

1. Providing notification to customers ahead of planned works
2. Giving updates to customers every [xx] hours (during the day) during incidents via appropriate channels (including but not limited to information on the website, SMS and email)
3. Informing customers when an incident or planned works are completed
4. Informing customers clearly and transparently of their rights, including to complaints and compensation
5. Where appropriate, setting up a dedicated communications channel to respond to customer requests for information
6. Tailoring support to customers to ensure that vulnerable customers receive extra support when needed during incidents
7. Having a complaints process that is easy to access and engage with



Customers' diverse needs: Action 1, Guidance A

The water company understands the needs of its customers and provides appropriate support including during and following incidents

- Companies should collect and record information on the needs of individual customers in vulnerable circumstances, and use this information to tailor communications and services for these customers
- Staff who have direct contact with the public should be suitably trained to be sensitive to the needs of vulnerable customers.
- Companies should ensure that customers are informed about the support that the company provides to vulnerable customers and how to access this, including accessing the Priority Service Register.

Customers' diverse needs: Action 1, Guidance B

The water company understands the needs of its customers and provides appropriate support including during and following incidents

This should include:

1. Proactively contacting customers to collect vulnerability information and informing customers of services available and how to access these
2. Making the most of day to day interactions (such as billing, or change of address) to understand the needs of customers, particularly if vulnerable
3. Taking into account a wide range of vulnerable circumstances including disability, long-term physical or mental health problems, elderly customers, customers with young children and customers on low incomes or in low-income households
4. Ensuring that customers in vulnerable circumstances are treated with empathy, respect and patience
5. Helping customers understand how data on their specific needs will be stored, used and shared
6. Working with other organisations (e.g. other utility providers, councils, charities) to help identify customers who might need extra support, including through data sharing

Customers well informed: Action 1, Guidance A

The water company is proactive in its communications so that customers receive the right information at the right time, including during incidents

- Companies should proactively communicate with customers about issues that are relevant to them, using appropriate channels tailored to the customer and the specific issue or incident.
- Companies should regularly communicate about relevant issues including billing, water efficiency, access to financial support.
- Companies should also inform customers quickly and efficiently during incidents, including providing realistic timelines on when the problem will be fixed.

This should include:

1. Companies keeping up-to-date records of customers' communication preferences and using these to contact customers wherever appropriate, and relevant to a specific situation
2. Providing information in a variety of formats and through different channels to account for the diverse needs of customers including via post, email, SMS, telephone and digitally (website/app) as appropriate. In specific instances this could include face-to-face visits
3. Informing customers of ways that they can help keep their water and sewerage services running smoothly e.g. using less water, avoiding flushing wet wipes, etc.
4. Evaluating and, where appropriate, adopting new forms of communication with customers

Customers well informed: Action 1, Guidance B

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4. Evaluating and, where appropriate, adopting new forms of communication with customers

Putting things right: Action 2, Guidance A

The water company learns from past experiences to improve customer service in the future

- Following incidents, water companies should evaluate their response to the incident, identify areas of best practice and lessons to be learned for future incidents.
- Water companies should use these evaluations to update their response plans to incidents, including working with relevant partners (such as the local authority, large users and emergency services).

Putting things right: Action 2, Guidance B

The water company learns from past experiences to improve customer service in the future

This should include:

1. Evaluating the response against agreed measures of good performance (covering, for example, response times, communications, providing alternative water etc.)
2. Proactively consulting customers on how lessons can be learned to improve customer service (e.g. through market research or talking to customers affected by an incident)
3. Publishing the findings of the evaluation in formats accessible to all customers including those with vulnerabilities
4. Taking responsibility for issues or disruptions where the water company is at fault
5. Clearly acknowledging where the water company could improve its response to future incidents

Customers' diverse needs: Action 2, Guidance A

The water company provides support for customers who are struggling to pay, and to customers in debt.

- Water companies should provide a range of options and payment plans for customers struggling with their bills which are appropriate and affordable to the customer, taking into account their specific circumstances.

Customers' diverse needs: Action 2, Guidance B

The water company provides support for customers who are struggling to pay, and to customers in debt.

This should include:

1. Having processes in place to identify people who are falling behind with their accounts as soon as possible
2. Taking specific steps to ensure customers are aware of support available and can easily access this support
3. Proactively contacting customers who are falling behind on their accounts as soon as possible through whatever channel is most appropriate, including home visits if customers do not respond to other channels
4. Ensuring that customers whose accounts are managed by local authorities, housing associations or other billing agents receive the same level of service as other customers wherever practical
5. Signposting or working with other partners (e.g. the local authority, Citizens Advice) to support customers who are struggling financially

Customers well informed: Action 2, Guidance A

The water company makes it easy for customers to contact them and provide easy-to-access contact information

Broader guidance

- Companies should offer a range of ways for their customers to contact them.
- These should reflect the range of preferences that people have for contacting service providers, recognising that preferences are different between different people, and that technology changes over time.

More specific guidance

This should include:

1. Making it easy for customers to find the company's contact details online via its website and via post (e.g. with bills)
2. Offering channels including phone, email, SMS, webchat, and self-serve options
3. Ensuring reasonable waiting time for customers by phone, for example by offering a call back service during busy periods
4. Providing a dedicated or extra communications service during major incidents so that customers can quickly contact the water company during these incidents

Customers well informed: Action 2, Guidance A

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Enforcement

What should Ofwat do in these examples?

One customer has sewage in their home on multiple occasions for three months due to a fault caused by the water company

Talk to water company	Order them to make changes	Order them to pay compensation	Issue a fine
A	B	C	D

What should Ofwat do in these examples?

Heavy rainfall causes sewage flooding in 300 homes

Talk to water company	Order them to make changes	Order them to pay compensation	Issue a fine
A	B	C	D

What should Ofwat do in these examples?

There is an unplanned incident meaning 1,000 customers don't have water for 24 hours. During this time, 10 disabled customers are not able to access alternative water supplies

Talk to water company	Order them to make changes	Order them to pay compensation	Issue a fine
A	B	C	D

What should Ofwat do in these examples?

A water company fails to update contact details for customers for one year. Because of this, during an incident it can't contact 2,000 customers by email or text (but it does post information on its website and social media)

Talk to water company	Order them to make changes	Order them to pay compensation	Issue a fine
A	B	C	D

What should Ofwat do in these examples?

A water company fails to take annual meter readings, meaning that 10,000 customers in one region receive a bill that is £100 higher than expected

Talk to water company	Order them to make changes	Order them to pay compensation	Issue a fine
A	B	C	D

Thank you!