

Domestic Customer Charter



We provide all of the public water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. We are committed to giving you the service you expect, all day, every day. We work hard to make sure you always receive a high quality service and we monitor our performance very carefully.

All of our information leaflets and letters are available:

- in Braille;
- in large print; and
- on CD and audio tape.

All information leaflets can be downloaded from our website.

Contents

Page

About us	04
About this document	04
Providing water	04
Providing sewerage services	09
Advice we will provide	10
Bogus callers	11
Responding to you	12
Contacts help and advice	13
Further information	13
Other useful contacts	15

About us

We provide 625 million litres of drinking water every day through more than 26,500 kilometres of water mains to the 800,000 homes, farms and businesses in Northern Ireland.

Every year we collect and treat more than 134 million cubic metres of wastewater from 663,000 homes and businesses connected to the 14,500 kilometres of public sewers.

About this document

We are committed to providing high quality services to all our customers. We produce a range of leaflets on the different services we offer to our customers.

This is a summary of the promises affecting you as a domestic customer, and shows the standard of service you can expect from us.

Providing water

New Connections

Each new property must have a separate connection to the water main.

If you apply to us to connect to the water mains for the first time we will tell you our decision within 14 days.

If we approve your application we will tell you:

- the charges you have to pay; and
- the conditions you have to meet.

If we refuse your application

we will tell you why. If you do not agree with our decision you can contact the Consumer Council (details on Page 14)

If there is no watermain to connect to,

you can ask us to provide a new one. We will do this if you pay our costs. We give an allowance for each property that will use this to receive mains water for the first time.

We will discuss this with you if you call our Developer Services Team on Waterline.

Water Quality

We work hard to provide you with high quality water. We carry out over 110,000 tests every year to make sure our water is clean and safe.

If you are worried about your drinking water, please phone Waterline.

If appropriate we will test your water and let you know the results.

If there is a problem:

- If you think your water has made you ill we will visit you on the same day to take a sample and let you know the results as soon as possible.
- If we find a problem that might affect your health we will tell everyone in the area what to do. This may mean boiling water before you use it, or (in exceptional circumstances) not using it until we have carried out more tests.

- If the water supply is not safe to drink (after boiling), we will provide another supply for example bottled water or water that you can collect from temporary tanks.

We will give this advice by:

- making announcements during news bulletins on TV and radio;
- putting information on our website and in local newspapers;
- posting a notice to you; and
- phoning or visiting you if necessary.

Water supply and interruptions

We aim to provide enough water for everyday things such as drinking, washing, cooking, running your central heating and flushing the toilet.

Sometimes we may have to turn off your water supply to carry out essential work. Please phone Waterline or check our website to find out:

- why you have lost your water supply; or

- when we are planning to turn your water supply back on.

If we plan to turn off your water for longer than four hours, we will give you at least 48 hours notice in writing to tell you:

- the date and time we will turn off the water; and
- when we expect to turn it back on.

In an emergency, such as a burst water main, we will not be able to give you notice, but we will turn your supply back on as quickly as we can:

- If your local water main has failed, we aim to turn your supply back on within 12 hours.
- Repairs to larger water mains may take longer, but we aim to turn your supply back on within 48 hours.
- If you don't have any water for more than 24 hours, we will make alternative water supplies available.

Lead

There is almost no lead in drinking water when it leaves our treatment works or watermain. Any lead usually comes from lead pipes between the main and your tap. This mainly affects older buildings.

If you are worried about lead in your drinking water we can test a sample of your water.

If you replace your lead supply pipe we will replace our communication pipe free of charge. Please let us know if you are going to replace your supply pipe so we can arrange to replace our pipework.

Water pressure

We aim to give you water at a pressure of at least 15 metres of head at the boundary of your property. This means it takes about 30 seconds to fill a 4.5 litre bucket from your kitchen tap.

If you think your pressure is too low, we will check this for free. We will tell you what we find and what we may be able to do.

Leaks and wasting water

We are responsible for repairing leaks on our pipes. You are responsible for the pipework within your property.

If there is a leak on your supply pipe we will:

- Ask you to repair it. If you do not we can serve a legal notice that orders you to fix it.
- We usually give you 28 days from the date of notice to repair the leak.
- If you still do not carry out the repair, we will fix it and charge you.
- In extreme cases (if the escaping water may harm people or damage property), we can turn off the supply until you carry out the repair.

Sometimes properties share a supply pipe. These would usually be older, terraced houses. Although one customer may report a leak, a number of neighbours could be affected. Repair costs may need to be shared.

It can be difficult to tell who is responsible for a pipe. Please phone Waterline and we will be happy to give you advice.

Protect your pipes

There are a few key steps you can take to help protect your pipes from leaking.

- Know where your stop tap is so you can turn it off in an emergency. It is often under the sink.
- Fix dripping taps. These waste water and a gentle trickle of water can quickly freeze and block a pipe.
- Insulate water tanks and pipes in exposed areas such as garages or roof spaces.
- Try to leave the heating on low if you are going to be away from home and leave a key with a neighbour, friend or family member who can check the house regularly for frozen pipes.

See our leaflet on protecting your pipes in winter for more information.

Saving water

Water is precious, whatever the weather. We should all do everything we can to save it.

On average, each of us uses about 150 litres a day.

We are committed to encouraging people to save water. As part of our water efficiency plan we do the following:

- We work to identify and reduce the number of leaks on our pipes.
- We promote appliances, facilities and practices that help save water.
- We work to increase the amount of water that is recycled.

If you notice a leak on a road or footpath, please phone Leakline on 08000 282011. Lines are open 24 hours a day.

We will investigate and carry out the necessary repairs as soon as possible.



Providing sewerage services

New Connections

You can connect your drains to our sewerage system, as long as:

- this is practical;
- you pay all the costs;
- you obtain permission first, and meet the conditions of the application process; and
- you meet the requirements of the road authority where applicable.

If you apply we will tell you our decision within 21 days and tell you the cost and conditions you have to meet.

If we refuse your application we will tell you why. If you do not agree with our decision you can contact the Consumer Council (details on page 14)

Septic tanks

Your home may not be connected to the public sewerage system and we offer a desludging service for customers whose household waste water goes into:

- a septic tank;
- a cesspool; or
- a domestic treatment plant.

This includes removing and treating up to 4.5 cubic meters of sludge.

This service is currently free of charge once in any 12 month period.

We must be able to enter your property and access your tank safely.

Phone us on Waterline if you want to arrange this service.

We aim to empty your septic tank within 12 working days of you asking.

Flooding from Sewers

Unfortunately sewers do sometimes flood. We understand the upset and inconvenience this causes, particularly if sewage enters your home.

- If your home is flooded with waste water from one of our sewers and you let us know, we will be there within four hours of receiving your call.
- We aim to unblock public sewers as quickly as possible. If you call us before 2pm we will unblock the sewer within 8 hours. If you call us after 2pm we will unblock the sewer before mid-day the following day.
- After a sewer floods we will help to clean and disinfect the area in line with Water Research Council guidelines.

There are times when these promises do not apply. For example if the fault or blockage is in your private

drains or sewers. They also do not apply if the flooding is caused by exceptional events such as a river or stream overflowing or a lot more rainfall than normal.

We are not legally responsible for loss or damage caused by flooding that is beyond our control.

Advice we will provide

This is a sample of the types of advice we can provide if you phone or write to us. Much of this is also available on our website.

- Separating shared supplies;
- Replacing lead pipes;
- New connections for water or sewerage;
- Building near our infrastructure;
- Maps of the public water mains and sewers; and
- Responsibility for pipes.

Bogus callers

Some criminals visit people's homes and pretend to be working for us. We call these people 'bogus callers'.

These callers can be men or women. They may trick you by saying there is an urgent problem with your water.

All our staff and contractors working on our behalf carry identity cards with their photo and the NI Water logo on it.

If we are carrying out work, our staff may need to go into your property.

Always ask to see their Identity card.

If someone comes to your door claiming to be working for us, please do the following:

- Check your windows and front and back doors are locked;
- Stop and think, 'Am I expecting anyone?';
- Ask the caller to put their identity card through your letterbox, rather than opening the door;
- If you have one, attach your door chain before you open the door.



If the identity card is genuine it will have the following information on it:

- A picture of the person at your door;
- A unique serial number;
- The date the card was issued;
- The person's name;
- The person's signature; and
- Our logo.

You can check that the person is who they say they are by phoning Waterline. Our staff will not mind waiting while you check their details with our customer service staff.

If you are not sure, do not open your door.

Password scheme

If you are on our Customer Care Register, you can ask for a password to help you identify our staff. Please arrange a password with us. Our staff will always use this password when they visit you.

If someone claims to work for us but does not know your password, do not let them in.

Instead please phone us on Waterline and we will check if the caller really works for us.

To register for this service please phone us on Waterline.

Customer Care Register

Other free services are available if you are an older customer, have a serious medical condition, or need extra help for other reasons. You need to join the Customer Care Register, by phoning us on Waterline.

Responding to you

These are the standards you can expect from us when you contact us.

Questions and Complaints

- When you call we will answer the phone within 30 seconds.
- If you phone us we will try to answer your question straight away.
- If you write to us we will reply within 10 working days.
- If we need to investigate your complaint we will explain what we need to do and we will write to you within 10 working days.

Keeping Appointments

- When we make an appointment with you we will tell you whether we will visit before or after 1pm.
- We will try to keep all appointments. If we need to cancel or change an appointment, we will give you at least 24 hours notice.
- If an emergency stops us from keeping an appointment, we will try to let you know.

Contacts help and advice

We are committed to giving you the service you expect, all day, every day.

What to do if you are not happy with our services

If you are disappointed with our service, we want to hear from you. This gives us the chance to put things right for you and make improvements so that other customers may benefit.

You can contact us using the information below.

Northern Ireland Water
PO Box 1026
Belfast,
BT1 9DJ



Phone Waterline: 08457 440088



Text Relay Service:
08457 440088



Fax: 028 9016 8002



Email: waterline@niwater.com



Website: www.niwater.com

You can ask for a free copy of our complaints procedure or you can download it from our website.

Further information

This leaflet is part of a set of leaflets about our codes of practice.

These leaflets give you information about us and our services.

The other leaflets in the set include the following:

- ‘Water supply services for domestic customers’ - This gives information on the water supply to your home.
- ‘Sewerage services for domestic customers’ – This gives you information about the sewerage system, who is responsible for pipework, flooded sewers, new connections and our right to enter your property.
- ‘Dealing with leaks’ – This gives you information on our code of practice on leaks and who owns pipes.
- ‘Work on private land’ - This gives you information on our code of practice if we need to work on private land.
- ‘Our complaints procedure’ – This gives you information on who to contact and how we will manage your complaint.


We offer a range of other leaflets, such as 'Using Water Wisely', 'Lead in Drinking Water', and 'Customer Care Register'.


To ask for any of the free leaflets, please phone Waterline or visit our website.


Independent help and advice from the Consumer Council


If you are not happy with how we have dealt with your complaint or would like independent advice, contact the Consumer Council.

**Consumer Council
Elizabeth House
116 Holywood Road
Belfast, BT4 1NY**

 **Phone: 0800 1216022**

 **Text Relay Service:
028 9067 2488**

 **Fax: 028 9065 7701**

 **Email: complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk**

 **Website:
www.consumercouncil.org.uk**

Other useful contacts

The Utility Regulator

The Utility Regulator is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland Water.

The Utility Regulator
Queens House
14 Queen Street
Belfast, BT1 6ED

 **Phone: 028 9031 1575**
 **Fax: 028 9031 1740**
 **Email: info@uregni.gov.uk**
 **Website: www.uregni.gov.uk**

Drinking Water Inspectorate

If you have complained to us about the quality of the water you receive and you are not happy with our response or feel we have not fully solved the problem, you can contact the Drinking Water Inspectorate, which will carry out a further investigation.

Drinking Water Inspectorate
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Gasworks Business Park
Lower Ormeau Road
Belfast, BT7 2JA

 **Phone: 028 9056 9282**
 **Email: dwi@doeni.gov.uk**
 **Website:**
www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/water-home/drinking_water.htm

December 2011

Northern Ireland Water

PO Box 1026

Belfast

BT1 9DJ

 **Waterline: 08457 440088**

 **Text Relay Service:**
08457 440088

 **Email: waterline@niwater.com**

 **www.niwater.com**

