



## **NEWS RELEASE**

**Monday Dec 7, 2009**

# **Scottish Water report card: Not bad, but not yet good enough**

*More needed to improve customer service and address sewer flooding, says Scotland's water watchdog*

Waterwatch Scotland (WWS), the independent consumer watchdog for Scotland's water industry, has called on Scottish Water to up its game when it comes to customer service.

Waterwatch Scotland Chief Executive Gary Womersley said: "If Scottish Water can continue to take a more customer-focused approach they would see a further dramatic fall in complaints. Despite the utility maintaining that its number one strategic goal is to provide a high quality consumer-focused approach the majority of contacts we received, some 27 per cent, still related to poor customer service. Consumers' complaints, including the lack of simple courtesies, administrative errors and queries that go unanswered have been further compounded by Scottish Water's failure to address problems early. Over half of all complaints we receive should have been easily resolved by Scottish Water or other suppliers and we will therefore continue to require further improvements in that regard."

Waterwatch Scotland's findings are contained in its Annual Report which the national complaints handling authority for the water industry in Scotland has published today.

"While Scottish Water's performance has improved considerably in certain areas, it still has a long way to go before it can match the level of service WWS considers Scottish customers should reasonably be able to expect consistently. Our Annual Report shows that there is considerable room for improvement – and not just in terms of customer service. External sewer flooding accounted for approximately 25 per cent of all issues raised and remains a major and growing concern too," said Gary Womersley.

WWS is pleased to see external sewer flooding being mentioned for the first time in Ministerial Objectives. However, the Annual Report shows that customers still require a far higher priority to be given to external sewer flooding by all industry stakeholders and Waterwatch Scotland is concerned that what is proposed will

not go far enough and that customers would continue to experience repeated sewer events for the foreseeable future.

“WWS will continue to work with Scottish Water to solve domestic customers’ problems and ensure a better quality of service and, with the recent introduction of competition, we will work even more closely with other suppliers to identify and resolve problems faced by Scotland’s non-domestic water customers.”

**-ENDS-**

### **Annual Report – summary highlights:**

Waterwatch Scotland’s Annual Report can be found at:

<http://www.waterwatchscotland.org/category/publications/governance-publications/>

Summary highlights include:

- A 14% reduction in 2nd tier (serious) complaints this year; a reduction of 64% since our first year of operation.
- 2071 issues were raised with WWS via 1055 customer contacts, representing a 2% decrease in contacts on last year and a slight decrease on issues raised overall.
- 27% of all issues relate to suppliers’ Customer Service.
- Approximately 25% of all issues relate to sewer flooding; 49% external flooding and 18% internal flooding.
- Dissatisfaction with community communication and consultation increases year on year.
- Following the introduction of retail competition, WWS noted a 36% increase in contacts from non-domestic customers last year.
- WWS continues to be a statutory consultee for the water industry representing the customers’ views and interests in Scotland.
- Eighteen Regional Panel meetings were held throughout Scotland within both rural and urban communities to identify and resolve water and sewerage issues.
- WWS has continued to ensure customer interests are represented when determining capital expenditure within regulatory periods.
- WWS launched its report on the affordability of Scottish household water and sewerage charges: household water and sewerage debt in Scotland stands at over £282.5m and is increasing.
- WWS published its full report on low pressure incidents in Kingseat. All nine recommendations were accepted in full by SW and have subsequently been acted upon.
- WWS, in partnership with SW, produced a Stated Preference report on customers’ willingness to pay for water and sewerage services; the results

have been taken into consideration as part of Ministerial Objectives for 2010-15.

### **Notes to Editors**

For an interview with Waterwatch Scotland, please contact John Macgill or Andrew Ritchie on 0131 556 0050 (including out of hours)

**Waterwatch Scotland (WWS)** is the national complaints handling authority for all domestic and non-domestic water customers and customer representative body for the water industry in Scotland.

WWS is independent of Scottish Water, government and other water/sewerage service providers. Its role is to:

- Investigate Complaints
- Represent Customers' Views & Interests
- Influence Policy
- Inform & Advise

WWS' responsibility for second-tier complaints handling means that WWS can take forward individual customer grievances against Scottish Water or other providers.

WWS can also make statutory recommendations to Scottish Ministers, Scottish Water and other service providers, and industry regulators: Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Drinking Water Quality Regulator (DWQR) and the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS).

From time to time, WWS receives complaints which are of such importance or have a public-interest impact beyond the specific complaint itself, that WWS will issue a formal report on the complaint and greater issues raised.

In addition to the making of such formal reports and the findings and recommendations made, a key role of WWS is to continue to work to ensure that such recommendations are adopted in the interest of customers to mitigate and prevent future occurrences.

Issued on behalf of Waterwatch Scotland, Corporate Office, Forrester Lodge, Inglewood, Alloa, FK10 2HU