

Q&A: Citizens Advice support for water consumers

- In April 2025 Citizens Advice responded to the Independent Water Commission (IWC) call for evidence. Subsequently, in a follow up meeting with the IWC we discussed the benefits of consolidating energy and water consumer advice and advocacy in the same organisation.
- In July 2025, the IWC's Recommendation 45 stated that responsibility for consumer advocacy should be transferred to Citizens Advice to provide a stronger voice for consumers.

How does Citizens Advice support water consumers?

Even without formal statutory status for water in England and Wales, we are already the primary destination for people struggling with their water supply or bills. In 2024/25, we helped 108,000 people with water-related issues. Our services include:

- **Debt Advice:** Helping 44,000 people manage water arrears and negotiate payment plans.
- **Accessing Support:** Guiding 64,000 people through applications for WaterSure, social tariffs, and the Priority Services Register.

For context, in 2022/23 (the year of their most recently published Annual Report), The Consumer Council for Water (CCW) handled 40,000 calls from consumers requesting support, advice and complaint escalation. CCW is an executive non-departmental public body (quango), sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and is the current levy-funded statutory provider of water sector consumer advice and advocacy.

At present, the support provided by Citizens Advice's network effectively doubles the Government's capacity to support water consumers. We do not receive any dedicated levy funding.

Why are we contacted by so many people about water-related issues?

As the People's Champion, Citizens Advice gives people the confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are and whatever their problem. We have a strong and trusted brand - 92% of the public are aware of us, and a similar proportion have a favourable view of us. When in need of support, people will always turn to a known and trusted brand.

People also rarely come to us with just one problem. In 2024/25 Citizens Advice advised people with an average of more than 5 issues each, often including a water-related issue. Because of our holistic approach to advice and advocacy, we're uniquely positioned to join the dots and provide advice which matches the complexity of people's lives.

Are there any limits to your ability to support people with water-related issues?

Where Citizens Advice receives dedicated funding, we are able to hire dedicated advisers with detailed knowledge of issues in a specific sector, invest in additional training for advisers and develop bespoke ways of collecting, analysing and sharing detailed insight about the issues people are contacting us about.

With our energy role, insights collected from the hundreds of thousands of consumers who contact us each year are regularly shared with the sector regulator, energy companies and government departments to help inform policy making.

Because we don't receive dedicated funding to support people with water-related issues, this limits the extent to which we can help people resolve what are often complex problems. Complex advice of this nature is only possible when provided by the levy-funded statutory provider of water sector consumer

advice and advocacy, as we know from our role as the statutory provider for energy and postal consumers.

Why did Citizens Advice tell the Independent Water Commission that it wanted to take on this role?

We believe the current support system for water consumers is falling behind. As the statutory advocate for energy, we see how a unified voice can drive better outcomes. We are focusing on water because:

- The system is unsustainable: currently, local Citizens Advice charities subsidise the water sector by providing tens of thousands of hours of advice without levy funding.
- Regulatory parity: we advocate for water consumers to have the same level of protection and high-level policy representation as energy and postal consumers.
- Bills are rising: with public trust in the sector at a low, most households are facing their water bills increasing substantially to fund necessary improvements.

At a time when the Government and the water sector are pursuing wholesale improvements in the way that the sector operates, Citizens Advice believes there is an opportunity to strengthen consumer representation and support. A strong, pragmatic, and high-quality consumer advocate is essential for driving the necessary change and rebuilding public trust in the water sector.

Citizens Advice took on the statutory responsibilities of and the majority of the expert staff employed by the government quango, Consumer Focus, when it was formally abolished in April 2014. There is provision in the Consumers, Estate Agent and Redress (CEAR) Act 2007 for the Secretary of State to transfer the statutory duties and responsibilities of CCW to Citizens Advice, with the consent of the Welsh Ministers. This would include its expert staff.

Why is a "holistic" approach to advice so important?

Everything we know about people's problems - and we help over 2.5m people every year across our service - tells us that people's problems do not remain confined to sectoral boxes. Every single person living in the UK is both a water

and an energy consumer and their problems intersect in ways that a fragmented consumer advocacy sector cannot address.

- Clients who come to us about water report an average of 5 different problems.
- 75% of those with water issues also report energy-related struggles.

By looking at a person's whole situation—including benefits entitlement (40% of our water clients), housing, and debt—we can provide a "one-stop" solution rather than just fixing a single symptom.

Citizens Advice helps people find a way forward.

We provide free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems. We are a voice for our clients and consumers on the issues that matter to them.

We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment.

We're here for everyone.

citizensadvice.org.uk

