

Audit of Scottish Water's Water Quality Event Consumer Contacts

Date of Audit	18 June 2021
DWQR Staff Present	Bill Byers
Scottish Water Staff Present	Scott Gibson

Summary of Audit

Purpose

Scottish Water reports Water Quality events to DWQR as they arise. These may be initiated through a failure of a water quality standard or some operational event at a water treatment works or in the distribution system. In addition, failures of treatment processes and interruptions to the water supply can have a detrimental effect on water quality and may lead to failures of standards at consumers taps. Scottish Water reported 650 events to DWQR in 2020. Twenty nine of these events were classified by DWQR as incidents.

Nine events occurring in 2020 and 2021 were selected for audit from those likely to have had a potential wider impact on water quality at consumers taps. Four of which had been declared as incidents.

The audit was undertaken to gauge the capture of information from consumers when they contact Scottish Water in relation to a water quality event; how this is reported to DWQR in water quality event notifications, outcomes and detailed reports; the use of and reporting of social media interactions and the overall reporting of consumer contact numbers to regulators and stakeholders. A period of time commencing 2 weeks prior to the recorded start date of the event to 2 weeks following that date was taken to examine the daily volumes and profile of all types of consumer contacts received by Scottish Water.

Summary of audit

The audit was carried out to follow up on the similar 2018 audit at which time Scottish Water was about to implement new consumer contact recording and reporting systems. The intervening period permitted time for teething issues with the new systems to be ironed out and for new processes to embed.

It is clear from the reports and data provided that the new systems provide a significant step forward in the recording of consumer contacts. It is now easily demonstrated that a number of channels, including social media are used by consumers to report their concerns and that these have equivalence in SW making a response. In all but two cases selected for audit, there is a high degree of consistency of reporting consumer contacts in relation to water quality Events and the overall extracts of data from the contacts database. In the two cases, there is an indication that a wider window of WQ impact is evident in the overall data than was reported in the Event outcome reporting and two recommendations are made on this aspect.

In the course of carrying out the audit it became clear that there was a divergence in the overall number of consumer contacts and those reported to DWQR as part of the regulatory requirements. The numbers being understated in the regulatory reporting. The discrepancy has been identified as arising from two factors. One, of rule sets that disregard repeat contacts from an address within a certain timescale on the basis that a service response within the organisation has already been raised and the other, that there is an issue of allocating some call addresses to their particular supply area.

On the first point, I am of the view that it is legitimate for a contact to be counted again if someone is motivated to call back because they remain unhappy with their water supply after a day, or the next day etc., as it reflects a continuing dissatisfaction with water quality, the response, or overall service provided. Otherwise the full impact and extent of any event cannot be properly defined. Similarly, although in this audit it is evident that some unallocated area contacts were included, the regulatory reporting for 2020 contained 2,338 contacts unable to be allocated a supply zone out of a total of 18,142 (13%). Scottish Water has taken steps to improve this but it is an issue that must be resolved to ensure parity in reporting and confidence in data submissions.

William Byers, Drinking Water Specialist.

Number of Recommendations: **4**