

Consumer Complaint Determination

2026/06

Discolouration and particles 5th February 2026

Basis of complaint

The consumer contacted DWQR on 05 February 2026. They explained that they were unhappy with the quality of water being supplied to her property and exhausted the complaints process with Scottish Water.

Context of complaint

The consumer made a discoloured water complaint to Scottish Water on 06 January 2025. After being provided initial flushing advice, The consumer made contact again to explain they were not satisfied with the taste and that the water was still brown with particles in it. Scottish Water arranged for an operative to attend to her property and take a sample. This sample failed for lead, iron, manganese, aluminium and turbidity. Scottish Water made several visits to the property to take further samples along with samples from neighbouring properties and a boundary box. They also undertook flushing at the hydrant outside the property before excavating and taking a cut out of the 6 inch main to inspect its condition which was found to be very good. The consumer's connection was then renewed. Despite these actions, the consumer remains dissatisfied with the quality of their water and reported that they still notice particles which vary in severity and have an iron like smell.

DWQR Assessment of complaint and the actions taken

On receipt of the complaint from the consumer, I requested all relevant information pertaining to this case and requested this to be sent to me by 27 February 2026. I received the requested information on time and commenced an investigation and assessment.

The water quality from the five samples taken from the consumer's property failed to comply with the standards for lead (3166ug/l, PCV 10ug/l), iron (412ug/l, PCV 200ug/l), manganese (133ug/l, PCV 50ug/l), aluminium (885ug/l, PCV 200ug/l) and turbidity (27NTU, PCV 4NTU) required by the Regulations. Of these failures, Scottish Water correctly identified that the lead result was the parameter of greatest concern with regards to public health risk. The consumer was informed by telephone call of the failure of lead standard when the first sample results were made available on the 22 January 2025. The health board was also informed via normal event reporting processes on this date. A letter was also sent to the consumer with a copy of the sample results and the advice to use bottled water for drinking and cooking purposes. Bottled water was provided. Scottish Water recommended that the consumer investigate whether any pipe work within their area of responsibility contained lead and arrange for this to be replaced, however it did not explicitly provide guidance on the potential causes, public health risk and remedial measures required regarding the other metals and turbidity failures.

Operatives were dispatched to investigate pipework within Scottish Water's area of responsibility and completed a flush of the local supply system from a hydrant outside the property with no issues identified. No lead was found on the Scottish Water side and a mains cut out later showed that the main supplying her property was in good condition. Scottish Water also renewed her connection.

Samples collected from four other neighbouring properties were all satisfactory. A boundary box was installed in June 2025 and a satisfactory boundary box sample was collected, demonstrating compliance at the point of supply. Scottish Water have also confirmed that there have been no complaints of discolouration or particles within the locality in the preceding 12 months.

All the evidence provided would indicate that the issue is most likely to be isolated to the property of consumer. Furthermore, the consumer confirmed with DWQR on the 09 April 2026 that there are currently no issues with the water which they are now drinking after boiling. Whilst the consumer is satisfied with the laboratory results and will continue to take samples, DWQR recommends that Scottish Water offer to take further samples and provide additional guidance.

Scottish Water has responded adequately to requests for information by DWQR.

DWQR does not uphold the complaint, as Scottish Water has responded in a reasonable way, showing that the water being supplied to the consumer's property and neighbouring properties is compliant and that it is most likely related to issues stemming from her internal plumbing.

I am of the view however that more explicit guidance should have been provided in the letter sent to the consumer on 22 January 2025 on the potential causes, public health risk and remedial measures required regarding not only the lead but also the iron, manganese, aluminium and turbidity failures.

Following this, further information should have been provided to the consumer earlier on as to the potential for backflow in the plumbing system to assist in complying with Regulation 20(5).

Recommendations

To comply with Regulation 20(5), DWQR recommends that Scottish Water write to the consumer to:

- 1) Offer to collect a further sample from the consumer/s water supply and provide clearer guidance on potential causes, associated public health risks, and any required remedial actions in the event of non-compliance. Scottish Water to also advise that the consumer engages a WaterSafe Registered plumber or Scottish Water to offer to arrange for an inspection of the internal plumbing to investigate the possibility of backflow and/or contamination from the internal plumbing system (including hot water system).

