

Consumer Complaint Determination

2026/04

Stained washing
27th January 2026

Basis of complaint

The consumer contacted DWQR on 27 January 2026, unhappy with the intermittent staining of washing since moving into a new build property in October 2021 and had exhausted the complaints process with Scottish Water.

Context of complaint

The consumer contacted Scottish Water in March-23 reporting stained washing and brown deposits despite replacing the washing machine and having an engineer inspect the internal pipework. Multiple visits have been made to the consumer's property by Scottish Water and the Housing Association between March-23 and March-25. Samples taken from the consumer's property and from the property boundary in August-23 and October-24 respectively were compliant with regulatory standards. Scottish Water excavated and replaced the communication pipe and boundary box on the footpath; flushed the service; flushed the main; and provided advice to replace some aspects of the privately owned pipework.

Despite these actions, the consumer remains dissatisfied with the quality of their water and reports that this intermittent issue is still ongoing.

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 20 February 2026. I received the requested information on time and commenced an investigation and assessment. Regulations referred to within this letter relate to The Public Water Supplies (Scotland) Regulations 2014.

The water quality in samples taken from the customers tap and from the boundary box outside the property were found to comply with water quality standards including Iron (Fe), Manganese (Mn) and turbidity (max 87µgFe/l, 9.2µgMn/l and 0.5NTU. The Prescribed Concentration Values at the consumer tap being 200µgFe/l, 50µgMn/l and 4NTU). Further sample results from properties across Cardenden taken over the previous 2 years also show consistently low levels of iron, manganese and turbidity (max 29µgFe/l, 2µgMn/l and <0.3NTU).

Scottish Water has received low levels of “Discoloured Water” contacts within Cardenden DMA between March-2020 and January-2026, with minimal contacts from 2023 onwards. No customer complaints have been received by Scottish Water from other properties on the street that the consumer resides, however the housing association have reported three other properties on this street experiencing similar issues. I am critical that Scottish Water have not investigated these additional reports in line with Regulation 17(1).

Operatives have attended the consumers property a number of times between March-23 and March-25 and have replaced the pipework and boundary box between the water main and property boundary, as well carrying out flushes from the boundary box, the supply pipe and water main. Samples were taken from the customer tap in August-23 and post mains flush in October-24. Although these samples were found to be compliant, there is no evidence that pre-flush and post-flush samples from the tap or hydrant were taken. In addition, Scottish Water have not taken comparative samples from properties upstream or downstream of the consumers property. Consequently, I do not consider that the investigation fully satisfies the requirements of Regulation 17(2)b in confirming the extent of any issue and to inform any conclusion that ongoing issues are associated with the

domestic private distribution system.

Following the samples taken in August-23 and October-24, the consumer was sent letters by Scottish Water's Public Health Team, which correctly advised that the water was compliant with the regulations and safe to use and drink. The letter sent in September-23 contained factsheets providing information on water quality standards, colour and discoloured washing, however, neither letter provided explicit guidance on the potential causes of discoloured washing or remedial measures that the consumer could take. Advice on a number of possible causes associated to the private pipework were provided to the customer / housing association by the Scottish Water operatives onsite.

Notes from the housing association indicate that a number of investigations into the private domestic distribution system have been conducted with no faults found. Scottish Water considered carrying out a plumbing inspection, however this was not carried out as the visit would be limited to visual inspection as fittings / appliances would not be moved. Reviewing the communication between Scottish Water and the housing association, I am confident that a joint visit could have been conducted, allowing a further plumbing inspection to be carried out with the support of a private engineer.

Whilst the water main that the consumer's property is connected to is plastic, the upstream water mains are a mixture of materials including Cast Iron, Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) and Asbestos Cement (AC). As such, it is possible that material may accumulate within the main outside the consumer's property which leads to a terminal end. I am of the opinion that there has been insufficient investigation to confirm that the issue is isolated to the consumer's property.

DWQR partially upholds the complaint as, whilst the issue may be private in nature, Scottish Water has not undertaken sufficient investigation to determine the likely cause of the consumer's complaint.

Recommendations

DWQR recommends that Scottish Water:

- 1) Conducts further investigation to satisfy the requirements of Regulation 17(2)
- 2) Undertakes a plumbing inspection in conjunction with the housing association
- 3) Undertakes investigation into the water quality issues at other nearby properties highlighted by the housing association.