



Drinking Water Quality Regulator
for Scotland

Consumer Complaint Determination

2024/51

Taste and odour complaint

09 April 2025

Basis of complaint

The consumer contacted DWQR on the 09 April 2025. They explained that they were unhappy with the taste and smell of their water and exhausted the complaints process with Scottish Water.

Context of complaint

The consumer has, for about 20 years, experienced a funny taste to his drinking water, which they described to me as being bleach type sour in nature. They tried changing brand of tea and coffee and cleaned and tested their pipework but neither of these actions helped. They made a taste complaint to Scottish Water on the 07 March 2024 which was logged as 'metallic' taste and a second complaint on 10 September 2024 which was logged as 'earthy/musty'. Scottish Water arranged for an operative to attend site to check chlorine levels in the water which were satisfactory. Scottish Water made four visits to the property to take further samples and flush the terminal hydrant in the street but this did not help either. The consumer remains dissatisfied with the taste of his water and has to buy bottled water daily. He also stated to me that Scottish Water could not test neighbouring properties because they had not complained.

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 05 May 2025. I received the requested information on time and commenced an investigation and assessment.

The water quality from the three samples taken from the consumers property complied with the standards required by the Regulations. The Public Health team wrote to the consumer to advise them that no taste or odour had been detected from the samples and that their water was safe to use as normal. One of the samples was taken and analysed by the more extensive Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GCMS) method and this also showed there to be no issues with the quality of the water, with only trace levels of organics detected. A sample was also taken for phenols and this also met the standards outlined within The Public Water Supplies (Scotland) Regulations 2014 (as amended). I also note that Scottish Water completed a flush of the local supply system with no issues identified.

Scottish Water has provided current and accurate information regarding the results from the analysis of water samples collected from consumers water supply. I do note that the consumer has reported that similar issues are not present at neighbouring properties (although Scottish Water have not sampled these). This would indicate any issue is isolated to the property of the consumer and such a Water byelaws inspection should be completed to establish whether the status of the internal plumbing system is contributing to this issue.

Note, Scottish Water receive complaints each year regarding taste and odour. Over the last year, Scottish Water received 31 taste complaints from consumers in the Balmore C regulatory supply zone. 9 of these were recorded as being described as chlorine, 10 for earthy/musty, 5 for metallic and 7 for TCP/chemical. This is not considered to be a significant or unusual number of complaints and there is also not a known issue with taste and odour forming compounds within the Balmore Water Operational Area. Scottish Water carry out an annual programme of sampling for water quality within the distribution zone which includes checks for taste and odour.

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 is compliant along with providing appropriate and correct information and advice relating to taste and odour.

I am of the view however further support should be provided to the consumer with the completion of a Water Byelaws inspection.

Recommendations

DWQR recommends that Scottish Water:

1. Collect samples from neighbouring properties for standard parameters including Taste and Odour to provide reassurance that no wider issues exist.
2. Completes a Water byelaws inspection at the property of consumer to ensure no issues with backflow or use of non-complaint materials that may be contributing to this issue.