

Chapter 5

Key outputs

Customer service – 2

Covering:

- DG7 Response to written complaints
- DG8 Bills for metered customers
- DG9 Telephone contact
- Special Assistance Register

Chapter 5

Key outputs

Customer service - 2

- **DG7 - Response to written complaints**
This covers the number of written complaints received during the report year and the time taken to respond to them.
- **DG8 - Bills for metered customers**
This covers the proportion of customers who receive bills for metered accounts during the report year based on actual meter readings and the proportion based on estimates.
- **DG9 - Telephone contact**
This identifies the ease with which customers can make telephone contact with their local water company.

The information above is used to monitor and compare company performance against the DG indicators. It is published, in summary, in the annual 'Levels of Service' report.

- **Special assistance register**
This identifies the number of customers registered.

Lines 1- 5: DG7 Response to written complaints

Aim

To identify the total number of written complaints received during the report year and time taken to respond to them.

Common definitions

Written complaints:

This covers any written communication from a customer or a customer's representative (e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureau, solicitor) alleging that an action or inaction of the company, or a service or lack of service provided by the company or agent/contractor has fallen below his/her expectation, even if written in mild and friendly terms. This includes any expression of annoyance or dissatisfaction by the customer, or disagreement with the company. Written complaints include those made by letter, fax and electronic mail and comments written on a piece of company correspondence, for example a bill, which is then returned to the company except where it is offensive or abusive.

Exclusions:

The company can exclude from the reported figures those written complaints that are:

- anonymous;
- about the activities of other undertakers or other utilities, for example signage around trenches;
- not about the services or functions of the company, for example complaints about executive salaries, sponsorship activities and company advertising campaigns;
- about non-appointed activities, such as plumbing services, consultancies etc;
- about recreational and amenity activities which are not defined as duties imposed by the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006, for example visitor centres at company sites, water skiing, angling etc.;
- returned in response to/alongside customer satisfaction survey questionnaires/cards (such complaints could be said to have been initiated by the company and would not have arisen but for a prompt by the company);and

- any comments that are offensive or abusive.

Response:

This is defined as a response to a written complaint that does one or more of the following:

- provides an explanation of the company's relevant policy or procedure and indicates why, in the company's opinion, no further action on the customers complaint is required; or
- informs the customer that action to resolve the complaint has been taken and identifies when the action occurred, for example flushing of mains; or
- informs the customer of when action to resolve his/her complaint will be taken if action cannot be taken immediately; for example, "programmed capital works are not scheduled until month and year, and should be completed by month and year".

Whichever type of response is dispatched it **must** substantively answer **all** issues/questions raised by the customer.

Guidance

Written complaints:

General statements of complaint are to be counted even though a standard type of reply may be sent. Complaints which may seem unfair or frivolous should also be reported, although further correspondence on the same subject need not be reported. The company should explain in their methodology how complaints are identified from all other correspondence and allocated to DG6, DG7 and non-reportable categories.

CCNI:

For the avoidance of doubt, the recording of written complaints received via the appropriate CCNI office on behalf of the customer should be included. The company should include in their commentary how complaints received from CCNI are dealt with including those received from CCNI via the telephone.

Petitions:

If a petition is submitted to the company, the company **must** respond to the customer who has sent in the petition. Depending on the nature of the petition, the company may also choose to respond separately to each person who has signed the petition. Each response the company makes **must** be reported under DG7 and details of the number of petitions and the responses the company sent given in the commentary. Details provided should include how many signatures have been included on the petition and how have these been recorded within reported figures.

Response time:

This is the number of working days between receipt of a written complaint by the company up to and including the day of despatch of a response. For the purpose of this calculation, the day of receipt is counted as day zero and the next working day as day one.

The despatch of a holding reply does not affect the total response time.

The number of working days between receipt of a written complaint and the despatch of a response is calculated as follows:

Complaint received	Thursday 23 February 2006	
Response despatched	Tuesday 28 February 2006	
Total days	23/24/25/26/27/28 February	6
Less day of receipt	23 February	1
		<hr/> 5

Less non-working days	25/26 February	2
Response time (working days)		3

The date of receipt is the date that the written complaint arrives at the company, whether or not this is the usual inlet. It is not therefore necessarily the date when it reaches, a customer services section or the date when it is opened, both of which could be later than the date of arrival.

For email contacts which can be sent at any time, the company should record the receipt date as the date it is delivered to the company even if this was not within normal operating hours.

Dispatch date:

The date of dispatch refers to the date a response is sent to the customer. It is not necessarily the date that the response is printed or the date that the response leaves the customer services section, both of which could be earlier than the date of despatch. The company should state in their commentary how the dispatch date of the response is recorded. Reporters are asked to comment where the company's policy does not meet the reporting requirements.

Postal strikes may impact on dispatch date. It is not expected that short term strikes will have a material impact on performance, however, the company should keep a record of the number of items delayed by a strike. Where systems do not readily provide this information, please keep a count of items of post delayed and the proportion that are DG6/DG7/other.

The company should report in their Annual information return actual performance but state in their commentary the impact any delays have had on operations within the company which have impacted on DG6 performance.

Some companies use one address (address 1) for customer correspondence and a different address (address 2) for customers to send payments to. Customers may include written complaints in with their payments sent to address 2 and these are forwarded on to address 1 using postal services. The company then deals with them directly and usually within DG7 timescales of them having first arrived arriving at address 2. Postal strikes potentially affect this process.

In such instances the company should

1. Continue to keep records to be in a position to report the actual number of days taken to dispatch replies, including any delays as a result of the post strike.
2. Consider if there are any alternative options for transferring records.
3. Keep a count of as far as practical, if not estimate, the number of DG7 replies that have been delayed as a result of the postal delays.

The company should report in their Annual information return actual performance but state in their commentary the impact any delays have had on operations within the company which have impacted on DG7 performance.

Contacts not dealt with at end of year:

Where written complaints are not dealt with at the end of the year, the company is to use one of the following methods:

- the complaint is to be included in the total number of complaints *received* for the year in which it is received and the response time is also to be included in the same year's information although it may continue into the following year; or
- the complaint is to be included in the total number of complaints received for the year in which it is *dealt with* and the response time is also to be included in that year's information although it may have commenced in the previous year.

Whichever method is adopted, care should be taken to ensure that undercounting or double counting does not occur and that the method used is consistently applied in subsequent years. The company **must** state in their methodology statement which approach they have adopted.

Holding reply:

This is defined as a response to a written complaint which advises the customer that the company will need to undertake additional research or other actions before being able to respond to the customer's contact. A holding reply can be counted as a substantive response if it informs the customer what further action needs to be taken to respond to the query and includes a date by which investigations or further actions will be complete and by when the customer will receive a further communication from the company. A holding reply will close a contact for reporting purposes but not for the company until all actions have been taken and a further response is sent to the customer. The company should explain their policy for using holding replies in response to customer queries in their commentary.

Where the company is unable to provide the date by which investigations or further actions will be complete the company must include the number of days in which the company will contact the customer again **and** the number of days after the contact that the substantive response will be sent to the customer. For example, where a visit is required the response should state the company will be in contact within XX days to arrange the appointment and that a substantive response will be provided XX days after the visit.

Repeat contacts:

Where a complaint necessitates a period of correspondence each letter from the customer is to be counted as a complaint and recorded separately. This includes letters that are passed for review/escalated in complaints procedure which should also be counted separately as complaints. If after a period of correspondence a decision is made that the original complaint has been dealt with as far as the company is able any future correspondence regarding the complaint need not be reported. The number of such decisions **must** be recorded in the commentary.

Reporting written billing complaints received about another undertaker's policies and procedures:

Where the company bills on behalf of other undertakers care should be taken about how written complaints are reported. The guiding principle is, the complaint, should be reported by the company that responds.

Reporting complaints to/about contractors:

Complaints *to* contractors or other agents about work being undertaken on behalf of the company **must** be reported under DG7, even if the contractor or agent deals directly with the complaint.

Complaints *about* contractors or other agents **must** also be reported under DG7, even if the complaint is referred to the contractor to resolve.

Answering written complaints by telephone or by visit:

Where the company use the telephone or make a visit to respond to a written billing contact, then the date of the telephone call or visit will count as the date of response for DG7 purposes.

Maintaining audit trails:

There **must** be an auditable record of response made by the company to all contacts regardless of whether the response is made by telephone call, letter, visit or by taking the necessary action on the customer's account. For example, a file note or a confirmatory response letter.

The company should state their policy regarding the use of responses by telephone and/or visit, and the timing of confirmatory letters in the methodology section. The company must state how they ensure that all responses are recorded with an auditable record.

Sampling:

Where the information for this indicator is derived from a sample basis the company **must** explain:

- the justification for using a sampling method rather than counting actuals (and when this method will be replaced); and
- the sampling method used by the company including how the sample is selected, the size of the sample and how robust it is.

Assumptions:

Any assumptions, including those which are made about the response times, for example to particular types of written complaints, **must** be clearly stated in the methodology statement.

Company commentary – DG7

The company should:

- comment on any matter which might have an influence on the reported figures;
- comment on any areas of the reporting requirement which are not met providing an explanation of why and what plans the company has in place to meet the reporting requirements in future years;
- state the number of decisions that a company has taken where they consider a complaint dealt with, **but may need to be re visited**. If there has been no such decisions, please state this in the commentary;
- provide details of the number of petitions and the responses the company sent during the year, how many signatures have been included on the petition and how have these been recorded within reported figures. If no petitions have been received this should be stated;
- state in their commentary how the dispatch date of the response is recorded.
- state how complaints received from CCNI are dealt with including those received from CCNI via the telephone.
- explain their policy for using holding replies in response to customer queries in their commentary.
- state any sampling method used by the company including how the sample is selected, the size of the sample and how robust it is, and the justification for using a sampling method rather than counting actuals (and when this method will be replaced); and
- provide justification for the confidence grade assigned to each line including an explanation for any changes in confidence grades from previous years. Confidence grades should take account of any areas where the company does not meet the reporting requirements.

Methodology statement

The methodology statement should clearly describe and explain the methods and procedures adopted in order to monitor and report on the levels of service they provide to their customers. It should follow the layout given in the introduction to the reporting requirements.

In particular the company should:

- explain how complaints are identified from all other correspondence and allocated to DG6, DG7 and non-reportable categories.
- state which approach they have adopted for reporting contacts not responded to at the end of the period.
- state their policy regarding the use of responses by telephone and/or visit, and the timing of confirmatory letters. The company must state how they ensure that all responses are recorded with an auditable record.
- state assumptions, including those which are made about the response times, for example to particular types of written complaints.

Guidance to reporter

The reporter should:

- Confirm or otherwise that all methods used by the company are as the company has described.
- Confirm whether the company has disclosed all assumptions.
- Confirm whether the confidence grades assigned by the company reflect the methods they apply.
- Comment on any area of concern/action arising from previous Annual information returns;
- Comment on any area/policy that does not meeting the reporting requirements;
- Comment on the methods used by the company. In particular:
 - the reporter should look carefully at any sampling techniques used by the company, confirm that in all circumstances where sampling is used, all weaknesses have been exposed by the company;
 - the methods used to identify DG7 contacts from all customer contacts; and
 - the methods used to ensure contacts are substantively answered before closure.
- Describe in detail the checks that the reporter has carried out in order to be able to confirm and comment on each of the points set out above. Including for example how the reporter has selected any samples for audit from the full population; quantity sampled; robustness of sample; materiality of assumptions and any weaknesses; discussions held with company staff.

Lines 6 - 12: DG8 Bills for metered customers

Aim

The aim of the indicator is to identify the proportion of metered customers who receive bills for metered accounts during the report year based on actual meter readings and the proportion based on estimates. However, to make allowance for meters that have been read at properties where the customer has moved it helps to think of the measure being based on the meter and not the customer. We understand that this may not be possible for the company due to the way in which the billing system is set up. Please ensure that you fully describe how you report this information in your Levels of Service Methodology Statement.

Common definitions

Metered accounts: are generally issued on a monthly, quarterly, or six monthly basis. The measure is concerned with monitoring the service customers receive during the course of the report year rather than the service received at company prescribed intervals.

Exclusions: The company can exclude any unusual accounts or unusual circumstances that would complicate the measure. The exclusions are:

- Charged on other basis;

- Properties occupied less than six months;
- Complex accounts;
- Void properties; and
- Check meters.

No other exclusions are valid. For example broken meters, or exchange meters must not be excluded.

Estimated bills: Occasionally, the company will discover some meters to be faulty, either at the time of reading or later when the bill is being prepared. In such cases a bill may be issued based on an estimate even though an actual reading was taken.

Similarly, the company may occasionally be denied access to read a meter and may therefore raise an estimated bill. These should be reported in table 5, lines 6 and 10.

Guidance

Metered Accounts: The company **must** clearly state in the commentary their current billing policy. This will include the frequency with which metered customers are billed, the company's intended frequency of meter reading, and whether customer meter readings are accepted and whether or not they are encouraged.

The indicator refers only to bills issued by the company during the report year. Bills issued after the end of the report year will be included at the beginning of the next report year, even if the meter was read during the current report year. Please confirm in your methodology statement that this is the approach you take.

Where a customer has more than one account, each metered account shall be counted separately. For example, a local education authority which pays water charges for twenty schools could have twenty metered accounts, each of which should be counted separately for the purpose of the indicator; i.e. the authority should be treated as having twenty separate accounts even though the account holder has the same postal address in each case.

Some companies offer customers the option of paying their metered charges via a budget account, usually at monthly intervals. These budget account holders receive a Statement of Account (six-monthly or annually) which shows payments made against liability for charges. The Statement of Account should show whether the liability for charges is based on an estimate of consumption, a company meter reading, or the customer's own reading. These budget accounts should therefore be treated in the same way as standard accounts i.e. the Statement of Account is, in effect, a bill.

Exclusions: The company can exclude unusual accounts or unusual circumstances that would complicate the measure:

- **Charged on other basis**
The company **must** exclude those metered properties where charges are not based on metered consumption during the report year.
- **Properties occupied less than six months**
For simplicity, only those properties occupied and metered for six or more consecutive months during the report year should be reported, the property need not have been occupied by the same customer throughout this six month period. Six months is an arbitrary choice but it does ensure that the company reports consistently and that individual properties are only reported once each year. For this to work properly the company should ensure they keep records to be able to apply this exclusion throughout the report year, and **not** just the last six months.

The exclusion would, therefore, cover those properties which had a split occupancy during the year e.g. 0-3 months, occupied; 4-7 months, void; 8-12 months, occupied. Although the property was occupied for eight months of the year it would be excluded from the measure as it was not continuously occupied for six months or more.

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Customer 1			Unoccupied				Customer 2				

The exclusion would also cover newly built properties occupied for less than six months even though the meter may have been installed long before the customer took up residency.

New meter installed
↓

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Unoccupied							Customer 1				

- **Complex accounts**

For each complex account, once the meter has been designated complex and excluded, it **must** be excluded each year and not just in the years where there are no readings.

Such accounts could include:

- single accounts which are based on the readings from more than one meter. They could be excluded because the bill may be based on a combination of estimates and meter readings;
- accounts based on differential metering;
- combination meters (main and by-pass). These can be excluded as a property supplied by more than one meter. Since this is only one supply then only one meter should be included in the counts, be it excluded, or actual read, otherwise this would be double counted; or
- meter network (main and sub-meters) – The main meter will usually be excluded as complex because its reading is not used to generate a bill. The sub meters however, should be included in the reported figures in lines 8, 9, 10 or 11 where these generate a bill.

It is not appropriate to cover all scenarios within the reporting requirements. The company should take a view about whether or not such accounts are unusual. The company **must** report in their commentary the reasons why the metered accounts are excluded and a numerical breakdown of the number of meters which fit into the different categories.

Estimated bills: As the measure is concerned with services received by customers the issue of such bills should be reported as estimated.

Company or customer read: If the company is unable to distinguish company from customer meter readings, they should leave line 8 blank. The company **must** report under line 9 the number of customers receiving at least one bill during the report year based on an actual meter reading either by the company or customer (or both).

Unbilled customers: Metered accounts that are not billed during the report year but which are charged on a metered basis (and are not empty) **must** be included in the total and reported in line 11.

Unread by company for two years: The company **must** report the number of metered accounts which have not been read by the company in two years. The aim is for the

company to tell us whether or not the meter (property not the customer) has been read in the past two years. This rule applies to any property that has been continuously occupied (by one or more customers) for at least 6 months in both report years. These accounts **must** be included and reported in table 5, line 12.

Such accounts that should be reported in this line include:

- Properties which have been occupied for 6 consecutive months or more in the first report year and occupied for 6 consecutive months or more in the second report year. For example a customer moves into the property in month 4 of the first report year and moves out in month 11, the property is then void until month 2 of the second report year when a new customer moves in.
- A property where it is void from months 0-5, customer 1 occupies the house from month 6 to month 8 of the first report year, customer 2 then moves in immediately until month 2 of the second report year, the property is then void until month 5 when customer 3 moves in and stays until the end of the second report year.

A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M
Empty			Customer 1							Empty			Customer 2							Empty			
Empty				Cust 1				Customer 2							Empty		Customer 3						

Examples of accounts that can be excluded from this line are:

- New properties which were first occupied by a customer less than two years ago.
- New meters that are less than 2 years old, at a property that was previously unmetered, i.e., not exchange meters. These can be excluded from line 12 (unread by company for 2 years) but should be included in lines 6 and 7 and in lines 8 – 11 as appropriate (company readings; company or customer readings (or both); estimated bills only; or no bills received during the report year).
- Where customer 1 occupies the property in months 0 – 4 of the first report year; the property is void in months 5 – 10 of the first report year; customer 2 occupies the property from month 11 of the first report year until month 3 of the second report year; the property is then void in months 4 – 7 of the second report year; and customer 3 occupies the property in months 8 – 12.

A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M		
New property				Customer 1																					
Customer 1				Empty							Customer 2				Empty				Customer 3						

It is not appropriate to cover all scenarios within the reporting requirements. The company should take a view about whether or not such accounts are unusual.

Reporting categories: The company should take care when completing individual lines to ensure that data is correctly reported. For example, a customer may receive four quarterly bills during the report year, one based on their own meter reading, one based on a company meter reading and a couple of which are estimated. This would be reported in line 8 (or line 9 if the company was unable to distinguish between company and customer readings) as the customer received at least one bill during the report year based on a company reading.

Company commentary

The company should:

- comment on significant year on year changes in reported figures;
- comment on any significant issues raised within the reporting year;
- clearly state their current billing policy, including:
 - the frequency with which metered customers are billed;
 - the intended frequency of the meter reading; and
 - whether customer readings are accepted / encouraged
- include details of how many metered accounts have been excluded and the reasons for their exclusion;
- clearly describe in your methodology statement how you have reported 'sewerage services only' properties; and
- justify the confidence grade assigned to each line.

Guidance to Reporter

The reporter should:

- Confirm whether all methods used by the company are as the company has described;
- Confirm whether the company has disclosed all assumptions;
- Confirm whether the confidence grades assigned by the company reflect the methods they apply;
- Comment on the methods used by the company. In particular:
 - the reporter should look carefully at any sampling techniques used by the company, confirm that in all circumstances where sampling is used, all weaknesses have been exposed by the company; and
 - the methods used to exclude properties from this measure.
- Describe in detail the checks that the reporter has carried out in order to be able to confirm and comment on each of the points set out above. Including for example how the reporter has selected any samples for audit from the full sample; quantity sampled; robustness of sample; materiality of assumptions and any weaknesses; discussions held with company staff.
- Comment on any area of concern/action arising from previous Annual information returns;
- Comment on any area/policy that does not meeting the reporting requirements; and
- Confirm that complex accounts that have been included or excluded in one year are treated the same the following year.

Lines 13- 17: DG9 Telephone contact

General

Aim

The aim of the indicator is to identify the ease with which customers can make telephone contact with their local water company and their satisfaction with the way the company handles their telephone call.

NB: The main guidance is split to cover the all lines busy and calls abandoned indicators separately from the call handling satisfaction indicator. Telephone complaints are covered at the end of the guidance. If the company is currently unable to report against all or part of this indicator they should state in the commentary when they consider they may be able to provide relevant data.

All lines busy and calls abandoned indicators

Aim

To measure the ease with which customers can make telephone contact with their local water company during office hours. The 'all lines busy' category measures the degree of difficulty customers' experience in being able to connect with a company agent or automated system. The aim of the 'calls abandoned' category is to capture the total number of callers who abandon their call before it is substantively answered by the company.

These aspects of the indicator are intended to monitor incoming telephone traffic which can be regarded as originating from the company's customer base. For example, calls from contractors and suppliers, or calls made by a company's field operatives to company offices are not regarded as customer contact and can be excluded from reported numbers where this is possible. If you are unable to remove these, this should be reported in your commentary. In addition, there are circumstances where calls made by customers about a company's services or functions can be excluded from reported figures. These are:

- calls to organisations acting as agents for the company, e.g. local authority sewerage agencies; contractors and debt collection agencies are excluded from the measure, unless they represent a principal customer contact point with the company. As a general rule of thumb, where the number of customer calls to an individual agency or contractor is below 1% of the total number received by the company, these can be excluded from reported figures.

However, for the avoidance of doubt, the company must report customer calls made to contractors/agents who act as an overflow or crisis management facility during peak periods, such as the billing season or major operational incidents. Similarly, the company outsourcing a key aspect of customer service (e.g. a metering programme) must report calls received by its subcontractors;

- calls to the direct lines of named individuals or specialist sections, except where the specialist section (such as debt recovery) specifically prints its direct dial numbers on the company letterhead; and
- temporary customer contact points established to meet a specific need e.g. to handle calls about a localised water incident or promotion of a company initiative. Temporary customer contact points are defined as those telephone numbers (separate from the principal advertised customer contact point) set up to deal with a single topic which will be closed down once the issue has been resolved. The company is, however, asked to use the commentary to identify the number and the duration that each temporary customer contact point was in place. You should also note in your commentary if these have not been used.

Calls in the above categories should not be excluded if, for example, the company has one telephone number that fulfils other purposes as well as customer contact.

Office hours: Office hours are defined as the hours that a company's principal advertised customer phone contact points are available. The relevant hours should be set out in the methodology statement. For the company who offer an automated / IVR system of any kind, then all calls to those lines should be reported, regardless of office hours.

Salient part of the message: where the customer has listened to the most important part of the message that leaves the customer fully informed of what action they need to take next.

Principal advertised customer contact points: For 'all lines busy and 'calls abandoned' it is not the intention to monitor all incoming telephone traffic, only that which is directed to principal advertised customer contact points. If you are unable to report for all such of these lines then this should be clearly highlighted in your commentary.

'Principal' means the main contact point(s) that customers are encouraged/directed to phone.

'Advertised' refers to those customer contact points that appear in telephone directories, newspaper advertisements, company websites, on company literature or are specifically printed (rather than typed) onto company letterheads.

Line 13 - Total calls received on customer contact lines: This is defined as the number of calls that are received (including those which are later abandoned) on the principal advertised customer contact points, and make contact with a company agent, enters a touch tone / IVR system or hears a recorded message that is **not** an all lines busy message. Calls that receive an engaged tone or hear an all lines busy message are not to be counted as calls received; such calls will be collected within the all lines busy aspect of the indicator. Calls intercepted by a message manager during localised incidents, such as burst mains, should be included in total calls received.

Line 14 - All lines busy: All calls receiving the engaged tone or hearing an all lines busy message should be reported in this category. This should also include calls where the customer hears the engaged tone as a result of a problem with the suppliers' line. This figure should be reported separately in the commentary. If this results in a material change to your DG9 performance we will add a footnote to the information published in the Levels of Service report.

Calls intercepted by a messaging service that advises a customer that the company is unable to take their call at present **must** also be reported against 'all lines busy'. Care must be taken when reporting 'all lines busy' when queuing systems are used. The general rule is that when a customer is held in a queuing system the call may be classed as answered if either of the following apply:

- when the customer makes a fully informed decision and chooses to leave their telephone number with the company for the company to call them back, having had the following information to inform their decision; a time by when they could expect a call back from the company; and where possible how long they would have to wait if they queued instead.
- When the customer chooses to wait in the queue and is then routed to an available line/agent.

If the customer is not called back in the time specified by the company, then this should be reported under line 14 – all lines busy. If the company has tried to call the customer back (regardless of whether the customer is available) in the specified timescale then this should be reported as a call received (line 13), if it is outside the promised timescale then this should be reported as all lines busy (line 14).

The call should be classed as abandoned if:

- the customer leaves the queue at any time before their call has been answered by an agent or automated service, including when the customer; listens to the queuing message and decides not to leave their telephone number and does not queue further; or hangs up during the queuing message.

Where the company plays a message to their customers advising them that all of their lines / agents are busy and then the customer is disconnected. These calls **must** be included in line 14 (all lines busy).

If the company is unable to measure the number of occasions when all lines are busy, but able to measure the time for which all lines are busy **must** use the commentary to report the actual time when all lines are busy. The company must also use the commentary to explain the reason why they are unable to meet this reporting requirement and when they will be able to. The company should assign a nominal time value or two seconds for each call and divide the length of time all lines are busy by the specified number of seconds per call. This will give a number to be included in this category. Details should be given in the methodology statement.

Line 15 - Calls abandoned: All calls that are abandoned, including those abandoned within ten seconds, are to be reported. If the company is able to differentiate between calls abandoned within ten seconds and over ten seconds they are asked to use the commentary to report the former figure; this will be used to consider whether the indicator will be extended in future years. If you are not able to report this, please indicate this in your commentary.

The company using automation of any sort should take particular care when reporting against this indicator. The guiding principle is that a call should be classed as abandoned when it has connected with any of the company's main principal advertised customer contact points, if the customer hangs up before their call is answered by an agent or before they reach the salient part of any message. The following is a list of examples and is not intended to cover all circumstances:

- Recorded messages - queuing: where callers hang up during or after hearing the recorded message advising them that they are in a queue, and before the company answers the call;
- Recorded messages - 'message manager': where callers hang up before reaching the salient part of the recorded message, for example, in the case of a message being placed on the company's system to advise of an operational incident, when the customer has heard the whole of the message, including an option to either reach the department for which they were calling or hold to speak to a company agent ;
- Answering machines: where callers hang up before the completion of the company's recorded message and the opportunity to, for example, leave a message;
- Touch tone telephones: where callers hang up during or after hearing the message but before pressing appropriate buttons;
- Touch tone telephones: after the caller presses the appropriate buttons, whilst they are waiting in a queue;
- Touch tone telephones: where callers hang up after pressing the appropriate buttons, but before their call has been substantively answered (whether by a company agent or by listening to a message), and reaching the salient part of the message;
- Automatic transactions/interactive voice response systems: where callers hang up before completion of the message inviting customers to leave, for example, a meter reading; and
- Automated payment lines: where callers hang up before they hear the completion of the message inviting the customer to input their account number or confirm, either by touch tone or voice recognition that they want to pay their bill.

Call handling satisfaction

Aim

To measure customers' satisfaction with the way their water company handles their telephone call.

Line 16 - Call handling satisfaction score: This is an annual score produced by four waves of customer satisfaction surveys that will take place at intervals throughout the year. The surveys are based on call data provided by the company to an independent market researcher. The data for all calls to all lines for the designated weeks is sent to the market researcher for each wave of surveys. The market researcher is appointed by **Ofwat** and Water UK and will carry out the surveys for all the companies.

The market research asks a series of questions. The results from asking 'Overall, how satisfied were you with the manner in which your call was handled' are used for the call handling satisfaction score. The market researcher provides the company with a report that combines the results of all four scores each year. The annual score generated from the 4 waves of surveys should be reported in table 5, line 16 (a score from 1 – 5).

Definitions

All calls to all lines: the call data sent to the market researcher must be **all** customer calls to **all** lines (including Operational lines) into the company 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of whether the line is a principal advertised contact point or whether the call was taken outside office hours. We therefore expect calls to automated systems, switchboards and debt agencies to be included. Where the customer has been provided with a number and they make direct contact with back offices, company works and depots and contractors these should be included, for example, contact with a local depot / contractor during operational work. If you are unable to report the data for all calls to all lines, then clearly highlight on your audit sheet, what calls are recorded, and those that you are currently unable to report on.

All calls (even those which are later abandoned) should be included in the sample even if the customer's phone number has not been recorded, is incomplete, is an 0800/0845 number, an overseas number, has been withheld, or is in an invalid format. This includes calls dealt with by automatic transactions/interactive voice recognition systems. For example, if you received 5,000 calls on an automated payment line then these should be included in the total calls received and the total calls provided, regardless of whether you have been able to capture a phone number or not.

The company may exclude from the call data provided to the market researcher:

- non-customer calls, for example, calls from contractors and suppliers;
- calls made by a company's field operatives to company offices;
- those that the company knows to have been from a customer who has an ex-directory telephone number; or
- calls made to advise that customer is deceased.

The company **should not** remove duplicate contacts from their call data. The market researcher will do this.

Audit sheets: Each time the company provides call data to the market researcher, they **MUST** also provide an audit sheet as shown below. Each of the audit sheets should also be included (as provided to the market researcher) with the commentary for line 16. In the commentary you **must** also include the percentage of 'usable contacts' for both billing and operational calls that were provided to the market researcher.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys Audit Sheet

Billing / Operational calls received

Date of data collection	Date	
Total calls received	Number	all customer calls to all lines 24 hours a day, 7 days a week/ Other - please specify
Total calls provided	Number	
Total Exclusions	Number	
Reasons for exclusions	Number	Non-customer calls, e.g. calls from contractors and suppliers
	Number	Calls made by company's field operatives to company offices
	Number	Calls where the customer is known to have an ex-directory telephone number
	Number	Calls made to advise that customer is deceased
	Number	Other - please specify
	Number	Other - please specify
Details of any factors that the company feels may have affected their performance	Provide details	

Percentage of usable contacts	Total number of contacts with complete phone numbers (divided by) Total number of contacts logged on the company systems (excluding allowable exclusions, but including those where the customers' phone number has not been recorded, is in an invalid format etc).
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Late provision of call data: If a company can demonstrate to us at the time of the survey that there is a genuine reason why they would be unable to take part in the surveys, we can agree to a company taking part up to one week later. This is discretionary, and only available in exceptional circumstances.

Confidence grades: The confidence grade for call handling satisfaction will come partly from the market research agency.

- The accuracy band provided by the market research agency based on whether a statistically robust number of interviews was achieved from the call data they received. (We expect the company will be in accuracy band '2'.)
- Data reliability band, provided by the company, based on the robustness of the call data provided to the market research agency as follows:
 - Band A: All customer call data was recorded and provided in the correct week, with a high proportion of useable contacts;
 - Band B: Most customer call data was recorded and provided in the correct week, with a fair proportion of useable contacts;
 - Band C: The call data provided had inappropriate exclusions or there was a very low proportion of useable contacts, or was not provided in the correct week;
 - Band D: Unconfirmed verbal reports, cursory inspection or analysis. (We don't expect this to be used for data.)

We are currently reviewing the percentage of useable contacts and may be able to further define proportions for Bands A, B and C for AIR09.

Complaints received by telephone

Aim

To identify the total number of complaints received by telephone during the report year. The definition of telephone complaints that appears below is consistent with that used for written complaints.

Common definitions

Telephone complaints: This covers any telephone call from a customer or a customer's representative (e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureau, solicitor) alleging that an action or inaction of the company, or a service or lack of service provided by the company or agent/contractor has fallen below his/her expectation.

In your commentary clearly state what definition you use for defining whether a call is a complaint or not. We expect that calls about the following water service issues are included as complaints:

- no water;
- lack of pressure;
- leaks;
- taste and odour;
- discolouration; and
- hard water (except for simple enquiries, e.g., dishwasher settings).

If this is not the case then make sure that this is clearly highlighted in your commentary.

We expect that calls about the following wastewater service issues are included as complaints:

- sewer flooding / blockages;
- collapsed sewers / manholes;
- smells from sewage treatment works / pumping stations; and
- flies from sewage treatment works.
- If these are not included in your reported numbers then please highlight this in your commentary.

General statements of complaint are also to be counted. Customers may complain unfairly or unjustifiably; nevertheless such calls are to be classed as complaints. Some complaints may be frivolous or vexatious; nevertheless these should be reported, although the company may take a contemporaneous decision that further calls on the same subject need not be reported.

CCNI: For the avoidance of doubt complaints received via the appropriate CCNI office are to be included. Follow up phone calls from the CCNI office actively pursuing the complaint on behalf of the customer are to be included, but follow up calls simply seeking additional information are not to be reported.

Exclusions: The company can exclude from the reported figures those telephone complaints which are:

- anonymous;
- about the activities of other undertakers or other utilities, for example signage around trenches;
- not about the services or functions of the company, for example complaints about executive salaries, sponsorship activities and company advertising campaigns;
- about non-appointed activities, such as plumbing services;
- about recreational and amenity activities which are not defined as duties imposed by the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006, for example visitor centres at company sites, water skiing, angling etc.; and
- in response to customer satisfaction survey questionnaires/cards (such complaints could be said to have been initiated by the company and would not have arisen but for a prompt by the company).

Reporting telephone billing complaints received about another company's policies and procedures: Where the company bills on behalf of others, care should be taken about how telephoned billing complaints are reported. The guiding principle is that the complaint should be reported by the company that responds.

Reporting complaints to/about contractors: Telephone complaints *to* contractors or other agents about work being undertaken on behalf of the company **must** be reported, even if the contractor or agent deals directly with the complaint.

Complaints *about* contractors or other agents **must** also be reported, even if the complaint is referred to the contractor to resolve.

Sampling: Where the information for this indicator is derived from a sample basis, the company **must** explain:

- the justification for using a sampling method rather than counting actuals (and when this method will be replaced); and
- the sampling method used by the company including how the sample is selected, the size of the sample and how robust it is.

Assumptions: Any assumptions **must** be clearly stated in the methodology section.

Common definitions for all aspects of the DG9 indicator

Company agent: A company agent is an employee of the company (operating from a principal advertised customer contact point). Where a principal advertised customer contact point has been sub-contracted, the company agent is the employee of the sub-contractor. For the avoidance of doubt, local authority sewerage agencies, contractors, debt collection agencies, etc. are not regarded as company agents as they do not operate or operate from a principal advertised customer contact point.

Configuration of telephony: The company is asked to describe in the methodology statement the number and configuration of incoming lines linked to principal advertised customer contact points; a schematic diagram should be inserted where this would be helpful.

Company commentary – DG9

The company should provide the following information:

- a description of where they are unable to report against all or part of this indicator, including where clarifications to the reporting requirements has required a change to the reporting methodology. And also include a plan and dates by when you expect to be able to report all aspects;
- details of any assumptions that have been used;
- identify whether there have been any temporary customer contact points in place, how long they were in place for and how many calls they received. Clearly note where no contact points have been in place;
- describe in the methodology statement the number and configuration of incoming lines linked to principal advertised customer contact points; a schematic diagram should be inserted where this would be helpful. The company should also identify the telephone numbers and locations against which they are reporting;
- for total calls received on customer contact lines, all lines busy and calls abandoned the reporting should be on office hours only. Office hours are defined as the hours that a company's principal advertised customer contact points are open. The relevant hours should be set out in the methodology statement;
- the company with an IVR system **must** report in as much detail as possible on the number of abandoned calls and where in the system the caller has abandoned;
- state any sampling method used by the company including how the sample is selected, the size of the sample and how robust it is, and the justification for using a sampling method rather than counting actuals (and when this method will be replaced);
- provide justification for confidence grade assigned to each line;
- whether the company is able to differentiate between calls abandoned within ten seconds and over ten seconds. These figures should be included in the commentary where possible;
- the audit sheets as provided to the market researcher which sets out the details of the calls that were excluded from the data sent to the market researcher and details of any factors that the company feels may have affected their performance; and
- the criteria for determining how complaint calls are defined and recorded, how agents are monitored / audited and how this is reflected in the confidence grades.

Guidance to Reporter – DG9

The reporter should:

- confirm whether all methods used by the company are as the company has described;
- confirm whether the company has disclosed all assumptions;
- confirm whether the confidence grades assigned by the company reflect the methods they apply;

- comment on the methods used by the company. In particular:
 - the reporter should look carefully at any sampling techniques used by the company, confirm that all circumstances where sampling is used and all weaknesses have been exposed by the company.

For calls abandoned in particular, reporters are asked to:

- Confirm whether the company can capture all abandoned calls. In particular, if the company uses an IVR system, is the company able to capture callers who abandon their call between choosing an option within the IVR and having their call substantively answered, either by an agent or by completing an automated transaction/listening to the salient part of an automated message;
- If the company is not able to capture and report all abandoned calls, provide/confirm an estimate of the number that are missed. If the company can only capture abandoned calls at certain points within an IVR system, please confirm company description of which are captured and which are not; and
- Confirm whether the confidence grade reflects the company's ability to capture abandoned calls correctly.

For call handling satisfaction in particular, reporters are asked to comment on:

- whether the company provided the data for all the customer calls they received in the designated weeks to the market researcher;
- any differences between the number of calls a company received in the designated weeks and the number they provided to the market research agency;
- how the weeks used for the surveys compare to other weeks of the year, specifically any changes in staff levels (with reasons), call volumes and availability of phone system; and
- confirm that the company records all lines where they receive customer contact, for example, if the company don't record calls to the switchboard, then the Reporter must confirm that this is because they do not receive customer calls, or that the calls are transferred to a call centre where they are later captured;
- For all aspects of DG9 the reporter should describe in detail the checks that they have carried out in order to be able to confirm and comment on each of the points set out above, including (for example):
 - how the reporter has selected any samples for audit from the full sample;
 - quantity sampled;
 - robustness of sample;
 - materiality of assumptions and any weaknesses; or
 - discussions held with company staff.
- Comment on any area of concern/action arising from previous Annual information returns;
- Comment on any area/policy that does not meet the reporting requirements whether raised by the company or not.

Line 18 Special assistance register

Common definitions

Customers registered for special assistance: those customers registered on the company's systems or databases at the end of the report year as requiring specific assistance in the way that water and/or sewerage services are delivered to them (as set out in Ofwat's Guidance to companies on "Services for Disabled or Elderly Customers").

Company commentary

The company should:

- explain the systems used to derive the information for this line and set out how the database of contact details is maintained;
- ensure that customers registered for more than one service are only reported once (i.e. ensure that double counting is eliminated). A breakdown of the number of customers registered for individual services is not required, although details can be set out in the company's commentaries if available;
- explain whether the reported numbers relate to "individual customers" or "households";
- comment on reasons for any significant difference between the number of customers registered between years; and
- set out how it advertises availability of the services offered. This should include how it actively tries to identify eligible customers and increase the number of customers registering for special assistance.

Where a customer receives a service from different suppliers for water and sewerage, both suppliers may report the customer as receiving special assistance.

Guidance to Reporter

The Reporter should:

- comment on the reliability of the data, based on the systems from which the data has been collated;
- comment on the appropriateness of the confidence grade;
- comment on whether the company has reported numbers on the basis of "individual customers" or "households";
- comment on whether double counting relating to customers receiving more than one service has been eliminated; and
- confirm that an explanation for any significant difference between numbers has been provided by the company.

Table 5 line definitions

A DG7 RESPONSE TO WRITTEN COMPLAINTS

1	Total written complaints	nr	0dp
Definition	DG7: Response to written complaints; total - Total number of written complaints received by company		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

2	Number dealt with within 10 working days	nr	0dp
Definition	DG7: Response to written complaints; number of written complaints dealt with within ten working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

3	Percentage dealt with within working 10 days	%	1dp
Definition	DG7: Response to written complaints; percentage of written complaints dealt with within ten working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Calculated: line 2 divided by line 1 multiplied by 100		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

4	Nr dealt with in more than 20 working days	nr	0dp
Definition	DG7: Response to written complaints; number of written complaints dealt with in more than twenty working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

5	Percentage dealt with in more than 20 working days	%	1dp
Definition	DG7: Response to written complaints; percentage of written complaints dealt with in more than twenty working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Calculated: line 4 divided by line 1 multiplied by 100		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

B DG8 BILLS FOR METERED CUSTOMERS

6	Total metered accounts	nr	0dp
Definition	This is defined as the number of customers receiving a metered account for water supply only, water supply and sewerage services, or sewerage services only i.e. both households and non-households whose water supply etc. charge is based on a meter.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

7	Metered accounts excluded from indicator	nr	0dp
Definition	Exclusions are defined as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> metered properties which are not charged on the basis of metered consumption; accounts for properties which have been occupied for less than six consecutive months during the report year, including 'void' properties; or complex accounts which are difficult to categorise. 		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

(i) NO. OF CUSTOMERS WITH METERED ACCOUNTS RECEIVING AT LEAST ONE BILL DURING YEAR BASED ON METER READING:

8	Company readings	nr	0dp
Definition	The number of customers with metered accounts who, during the report year, received at least one bill based on a company meter reading (regardless of whether other bills are based on estimates or customer readings).		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

9	Company or customer readings (or both)	nr	0dp
Definition	The number of customers receiving a bill based on a meter reading (either by the company or the customer) during the report year.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

(ii) NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS WITH METERED ACCOUNTS RECEIVING:

10	Estimated bills only	nr	Odp
Definition	This category is defined as the number of customers with metered accounts who received only estimated bills during the report year and did not receive a bill based on a meter reading, either by the company or the customer.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

11	No bills received during report year	nr	Odp
Definition	The number of customers with metered accounts who were not billed at all during the report year but who would normally be charged on the basis of metered consumption. (That is, unbilled accounts which are not void and which are not charged on some other basis.)		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

12	Unread by company for 2 years	nr	Odp
Definition	The number of customers with metered accounts, which in the last two years have not received a bill, based on a company meter reading. Regardless of the number of estimated or customer read bills received (i.e. the number of metered accounts which only have received estimated bills or bills based on customer meter readings in the last two years).		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

C DG9 TELEPHONE CONTACT

13	Total calls received on customer contact lines	nr	Odp
Definition	<p>This covers all telephone calls to principal advertised customer contact points which can be logged by company monitoring equipment. Calls received is defined as the number of calls which enter the company's telephone system and receive a ringing tone. Calls which receive an engaged tone are to be excluded from this line but will be reflected in line 14.</p> <p>The company should identify in the commentary the telephone numbers and locations against which they are reporting.</p>		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

14	All lines busy	nr	0dp
Definition	The total number of calls into the principal advertised customer contact points that receive engaged tones, or are advised that the company is unable to take their call, are to be reported against this line.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

15	Total of abandoned calls	nr	0dp
Definition	The total number of telephone calls received which were abandoned before a company agent could substantively answer them or, where recorded messages (or answering machines or touch-tone telephones or automatic transactions or interactive voice response systems) are used, before completion of the relevant message.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

16	Call handling satisfaction	nr	2dp
Definition	The annual satisfaction score generated by 4 waves of customer surveys.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

17	Total telephone complaints	nr	0dp
Definition	The total number of customer complaints received by the company by telephone.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

D SPECIAL ASSISTANCE REGISTER

18	Customers on the special assistance register	nr	0dp
Definition	The number of customers registered for special assistance at the end of the reporting year. Customers who are registered for more than one service should be reported only once.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

CHANGE CONTROL SHEET

CHAPTER 5

2008/1.0	First issue of chapter for the SBP period