

## **Final Report:**

*A study from a customer's perspective to establish:*

What information customers can gather for both general and specific drinking water quality enquiries

and

Whether water companies are meeting the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations for 2000 (England) and 2001 (Wales), and 2007 revision

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Date: April 2008

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## Executive Summary

This report contains the results of the research that was commissioned in December 2007. It was stimulated by an amendment in December 2007 to the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations for 2000 (England) and 2001 (Wales). This change recognises social change particularly the growing use of the Internet for providing public access to information.

The research is portrayed from a customer perspective using a 'mystery shopper' approach and investigated how companies were discharging the new regulation and what customers could find out about drinking water quality from the Internet, local authority and water company web sites, as well as specific telephone and electronic enquiries to customer call centres

The research also compares results, where possible, with a similar study undertaken in Water Companies in England and Wales also commissioned by the Drinking Water Inspectorate in 2006.

The research consisted of:

- a review of 30 local authority web sites, which represents 8% of the local authorities in England and Wales
- an Internet search for 7 water-related phrases
- a review of 25 water company websites with regard to drinking water quality content
- a telephone call to all 25 water companies in England and Wales (excluding Albion Water) to request an area-specific drinking water quality report
- downloading an area specific drinking water quality report, in the 12 water companies that offer this facility to customers
- an electronic request for an area specific water quality report to the 13 water companies who do not offer download facilities for customers

The research found that:

- there was scant information on local authority web sites about drinking water quality
- government and water regulators appeared in all water-related topic searches
- in 70% of water company web sites navigation to drinking water quality information was easily achievable from their web site home pages
- water company websites did not always provide clear contact information for customers
- some of the drinking water quality information on water company websites was significantly out of date

- half of the water companies that responded to contact by telephone enclosed an explanation to the drinking water quality reports they provided
- only 4 water companies (16%) explained that the water was safe to drink, or that the quality was good
- a large proportion of water companies (36%) were not meeting the deadline of answering the customer's request for information within 7 days
- there were a large number of water companies that did not or would not respond to the request for a drinking water quality report; 7 who were contacted by telephone, and 2 by electronic means
- not all water companies have procedures for dealing with requests from members of the public who were not existing customers but required water quality information for a location within the company's supply area

A summary of the high level recommendations are to:

- encourage local authorities to be more customer-friendly by providing more information on their web sites about drinking water quality, together with water company contact details and links to their web sites
- ensure that all water company call centre agents and customer enquiry departments are aware of the response-time deadline of 7 days, their duty to provide the required information, and that staff are trained to effectively and efficiently deal with these enquiries, or refer to the appropriate department
- urge water companies to put procedures in place to ensure that enquiries for information within their supply area from potential customers or other members of the public outside the company's catchment area are dealt with efficiently and effectively.
- request water companies to regularly review and check the relevancy and currency of their drinking water quality information, to ensure that relevant drinking water quality information throughout their site is cross checked for accuracy and that links are successfully implemented
- encourage water companies automatically send an explanation to the water quality reports requested by customers, and where possible to ensure them of the quality of their drinking water.

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## Section 1.0 Introduction

The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations for 2000 (England) and 2001 (Wales) were amended in December 2007. Water companies are no longer required to provide drinking water quality reports to local authorities, and there is no longer a need for water companies to maintain a public register of results. Part VIII, Records and Information under Provision of Information states that:

“...any person may request a relevant supplier to send him a copy of any record maintained by the relevant supplier under regulation 34, and the relevant supplier shall, within seven days of the receipt of the request, send a copy of the record requested to the person”.

The revision also states that:

“...in the case of a request relating to a water supply zone, free of charge if the person receives a supply of water in the zone; or in any other case, on payment of such reasonable charge as the relevant supplier may determine....”

This change recognises social change particularly the growing use of the Internet for providing public access to information.

In simple terms the new regulatory requirement allows any person to have access to drinking water quality information within a period of 7 days. This information is to be provided free for current customers, although non-customers may be charged.

In December 2007 the Drinking Water Inspectorate commissioned this review to establish how companies are discharging this new regulation, and whether there are any obstacles for customers wishing to access drinking water quality information.

The research is portrayed from a customer perspective using a ‘mystery shopper’ approach (see Appendix 1 for a short account of mystery shopping). It investigated what information customers can obtain about the quality of drinking water in England and Wales using internet searches, local authority and water company web sites, and water company customer enquiry centres.

The aims of this research were to establish:

- (i) whether there is any information for customers on drinking water quality on local authorities (LA) web sites by spot checking a number of LA web sites in each CC Water region
- (ii) the top ten websites that appear when using the Google search engine ‘pages from the UK’ for a number of water-related terms
- (iii) whether all water companies in England and Wales have their own web sites, and how easy it is to find each water company’s web site using the Google search engine pages from the UK
- (iv) whether water company web sites have clear access to general and area-specific drinking water quality information
- (v) how water companies respond to telephone and email requests for drinking water quality reports from members of the public

- (vi) any barriers that exist for customers accessing information regarding drinking water quality
- (vii) whether the drinking water quality information available to customers has improved since a similar study carried out in 2006

For (v) above to use a 'Mystery Shopper' approach to request two drinking water quality reports for a particular region from each water company. One request was made by telephone to company customer centres, and the second report downloaded from company web sites where the facility was available, or alternatively a request made by web form or email.

Particular research aims in relation to the 'Mystery Shopper' research were to establish whether companies:

- complied with the 7-working day deadline for information
- provided a courteous 'customer-friendly' response, with clear ownership and an offer for customers to approach them for further information
- incurred a charge for the information to non-customers

and to establish whether the information available is:

- up to date
- clear
- accompanied by a layman's explanation of technical terms

## Section 2.0 Methodology

This report comprises four components:

- local authority web site evaluation
- Google web site searches for water related phrases
- water company website evaluation
- water company 'mystery shop' for drinking water quality reports

### 2.1 Local authority web site evaluation

A total of 30 local authority web sites were evaluated to establish whether they contained any information regarding drinking water quality and, if so, whether there were any references or links to DWI or local water companies.

Five local authorities were randomly selected in each of the 6 CC Water geographical regions. The sample size of 30 represented 8% of the total number of local authorities in England and Wales (375).

As the local authority sites contain vast quantities of information, where possible a search within each site was made using the terms:

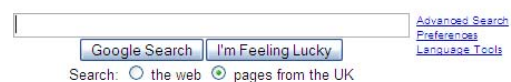
- drinking water quality
- water supply
- tap water
- Drinking Water Inspectorate
- water company name (the name of each water company serving the population of each local authority area)

### 2.2 Google web site searches for water related phrases

A search was made using the Google search engine for results in the UK to establish:-

- the top ten websites that appear for each of the following water-related phrases:

- drinking water quality
- tap water quality
- drinking water standards
- drinking water safety
- drinking water regulator
- how safe is my tap water
- who tests my tap water



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- whether water companies had their own web sites
- how easily customers could find their water company
- the ease with which customers could establish which water company provides their water

### 2.3 Water company website evaluation

Each water company website was scrutinized to establish:-

- whether customers could obtain information relating to general and specific drinking water facts, and how easily and quickly
- the amount of drinking water quality information available
- whether clear contact details were provided within the drinking water quality pages to request further information
- whether the information available on-line was understandable to customers with limited/no scientific knowledge
- how current the information was
- whether there was any evidence on water company web sites of the current regulations inviting customers to contact their water company

### 2.4 Water company research using mystery shopper approach

For each Water Company in England and Wales serving end-user customers (*excludes Albion Water*) two geographical areas were selected; where possible one in a rural location and one in an urban location.

It is widely known that most water company databases use either customer numbers or customer post codes to search for information. Therefore two addresses in each water company were selected, using addresses known to the researcher or by searching for properties for sale using an on-line estate agent ([www.rightmove.co.uk](http://www.rightmove.co.uk)). Where post codes were not available a search was followed up using the Royal Mail's post code finder ([www.royalmail.com](http://www.royalmail.com)). Care was taken to ensure that post codes were not unique to one property.

Each company's customer centre was approached by telephone by a 'Mystery Shopper' who requested a drinking water quality report for **one** of the geographical areas mentioned above.

For the second geographical area firstly an attempt was made to access a drinking water quality report using the company's web site. Where this was not possible a request was made either using the company's web site 'contact us' web form, or if this facility was not available a request was made to the company by email.

Each contact by telephone, email or web form together with the company's response was rated using a number of qualitative and quantitative criteria. Both tangible and intangible aspects of customer service have been reviewed - the tangible included response times, quality of data received, and the intangible assessed how the customer might feel when doing business with the company.

### Section 3.0 Findings and analysis

The findings and analysis pages use a combination of ‘smiley faces’ and ‘traffic light’ colours to illustrate the ratings and to enable the reader to see the results at a glance.

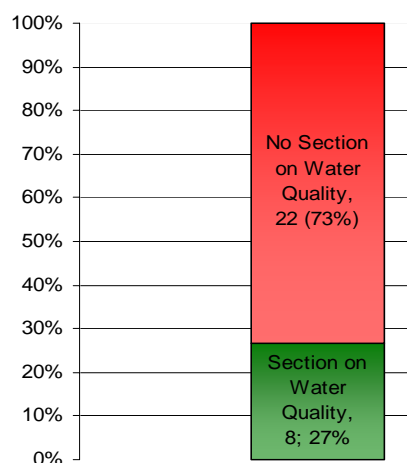
The following key can be used as a guide to following results:

Key to Analysis	
😊	very good, good
😐	ok, acceptable, average
😞	poor or unacceptable

#### 3.1 Local Authority web site review

30 websites, as identified in the table below were randomly selected to establish what information could be found regarding drinking water quality.

8 local authority (LA) web sites had a page relating to ‘water quality’ on their web sites which represents 27% of the sample as shown in the graph to the right.



The 8 LAs are identified in the table below by bullet points. The table also shows that one third (10) of the sample of LAs referred to the Drinking Water Inspectorate and all but 2 of these authorities had a link to the DWI web site, although 2 of the links were not working.

A few more LAs (14), just under half of the sample, referred to local water companies, with 9 of these also having a link to the water company’s web site.

Tendring District Council provided a link to Water UKs web site, but not DWI web site.

##### 3.1.1 Issues with LA web sites

Lack of information - generally there was limited information found on web sites relating to drinking water quality, and where ‘water quality’ was mentioned this was generally combined with non-potable water quality, flooding and pollution issues, and information regarding private water supplies.

One LA (Denbighshire CC) mentions both Dwr Cymru and Dee Valley but unhelpfully suggests that customers should “...look up their phone number in the telephone directory under Water”

Navigation – reference to drinking water quality was difficult to find and often several clicks away from Home page as shown in the web site navigation table below.

Local Authority	DWI	WCo	CC Water Region
• <b>Babergh District Council</b>	✓✓	✓✓	Eastern
Basildon D.C.			Eastern
Forest Heath District Council	✓x	✓✓	Eastern
Tendring District Council		✓✓	Eastern
Waveney District Council			Eastern
• <b>Amber Valley District Council</b>		✓✓	Midlands
Birmingham City Council			Midlands
Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council			Midlands
• <b>Tewkesbury Borough Council</b>	✓✓	✓	Midlands
Stroud D.C.		✓	Midlands 95% Western 5%
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	✓		Northern
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council			Northern
Chester-Le-Street District Council	✓✓		Northern
Newcastle City Council			Northern
South Lakeland District Council		✓✓	Northern
• <b>Adur D.C.</b>	✓x	✓✓	Southern
Maidstone Borough Council			Southern
• <b>Portsmouth City Council</b>			Southern
Rushmoor Borough Council			Southern
• <b>Shepway District Council</b>		✓	Southern
Enfield, London Borough of			Thames
• <b>Reigate and Banstead Borough Council</b>	✓✓		Thames
South Bucks D.C.	✓✓	✓✓	Thames
West Berkshire District Council		✓	Thames
Woking Borough Council	✓✓		Thames
Carmarthenshire City Council		✓✓	Wales
City & County of Swansea		✓✓	Wales
Denbighshire County Council	✓	✓	Wales
• <b>Sir y Flintshire</b>			Wales
Wrexham County Borough Council			Wales

Key to table	
•	Water Quality Page
✓	Mention of DWI or Water Company
✓✓	Link to DWI or Water Company
✓x	Link to DWI or Water Company – but link not working

Local Authority Web Site Navigation to Water Quality
Home> <b>Environment</b> and Planning> <b>Pollution</b> >Water
Home> <b>Environment</b> >Environmental Health>Food Safety>Drinking Water
Home> <b>Environment</b> >Neighbourhood Enforcement>Water <b>Pollution</b>
Home> <b>Environment</b> >Pollution> <b>Pollution</b> control - water
Home> <b>Environment</b> >Pollution> <b>Pollution</b> Control - Water
Home> <b>Environment</b> > <b>Pollution</b> >Water
Home> <b>Environment</b> > <b>Pollution</b> >Water Pollution>Drinking Water docs>flooding>water supply
Home> <b>Environment</b> > <b>Pollution</b> >Water Sampling
Home>Your <b>Environment</b> >water, drainage and flooding>water supply protection from pollution
Home>Planning and regulation> <b>Environmental</b> Health> <b>Pollution</b> >Water Pollution
Home>your Council>Planning and Public Protection Service> <b>Pollution</b> & Scientific Services>Water Quality <b>Pollution</b> > Public water supplies
Home>Policing and Public Safety>Water Supply
Home>Services>Business and industry>business sectors>Distribution and services industry>Utilities> Water Supply
Home>services> <b>Environment</b> >water resources>water quality
Home>Services> <b>Environmental</b> Health>Drinking Water Safety
Home>Water Supplies
* note others not clear as only identifiable from an a-z search

### 3.1.2 Best LA web site

The picture below shows the page from Adur District Council. This was considered the best LA web site from those sampled.



Even though the information was sparse, it does mention both private and mains water supplies, and the following:

**Mains water supplies**

Mains water is supplied by Southern Water, who have an extensive monitoring programme of chemical and bacteriological sampling to ensure that the water reaching your tap is safe. The council does not carry out its own sampling programme.

The council receives reports from Southern Water on this monitoring programme. Southern Water also provides additional reports whenever there is an incident which might affect the quality of mains water supplies.

The Site also has links to DWI, Southern Water and the Water Guide websites.

### 3.2 Google web site searches for water related phrases

For each of the following 7 water related phrases, the top ten listed websites which appear on the Google search engine are shown in the table below.

- drinking water quality
- tap water quality
- drinking water standards
- drinking water safety
- drinking water regulator
- how safe is my tap water
- who tests my tap water

It should be noted that as information on websites is dynamic and constantly being updated, the following should be viewed as a snapshot pertaining on the day of the search. The searches were undertaken in February 2008.

Search Phrase	Top Ten Hits
<p><b>drinking water quality:</b></p> <p>6 Govt/Regulators 3 Water Companies 1 Academic Organisation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drinking Water Inspectorate <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>2. Drinking Water Quality Regulator (Scotland) <a href="http://www.dwqr.org.uk">www.dwqr.org.uk</a></li> <li>3. Anglian Water Services <a href="http://www.anglianwater.co.uk">www.anglianwater.co.uk</a></li> <li>4. Defra UK <a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk">www.defra.gov.uk</a></li> <li>5. Cambridge University Press <a href="http://www.cambridge.org">www.cambridge.org</a></li> <li>6. Scottish Government <a href="http://www.scotland.gov.uk">www.scotland.gov.uk</a></li> <li>7. Office of Public Sector info. <a href="http://www.opsi.gov.uk">www.opsi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>8. United Utilities <a href="http://www.unitedutilities.com">www.unitedutilities.com</a></li> <li>9. Environment Heritage Services, Northern Ireland <a href="http://www.ehsni.gov.uk">www.ehsni.gov.uk</a></li> <li>10. Dwr Cymru <a href="http://www.dwrcymru.co.uk">www.dwrcymru.co.uk</a></li> </ol>
<p><b>tap water quality:</b></p> <p>4 Library/Journal/Media 3 Govt/Regulators 3 Water Companies</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practical Fishkeeping <a href="http://www.practicalfishkeeping.co.uk">www.practicalfishkeeping.co.uk</a></li> <li>2. Portsmouth Water <a href="http://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk">www.portsmouthwater.co.uk</a></li> <li>3. Scottish Government <a href="http://www.scotland.gov.uk">www.scotland.gov.uk</a></li> <li>4. Informaworld (Journals) <a href="http://www.informaworld.com">www.informaworld.com</a></li> <li>5. Drinking Water Inspect. <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>6. Thames Water Utilities <a href="http://www.thameswater.co.uk">www.thameswater.co.uk</a></li> <li>7. DWQ Reg Scotland <a href="http://www.dwqr.org.uk">www.dwqr.org.uk</a></li> <li>8. Ingenta Connect <a href="http://www.ingentaconnect.com">www.ingentaconnect.com</a></li> <li>9. Lab News <a href="http://www.labnews.co.uk">www.labnews.co.uk</a></li> <li>10. Anglian Water <a href="http://www.anglianwater.co.uk">www.anglianwater.co.uk</a></li> </ol>

Search Phrase	Top Ten Hits
<p><b>drinking water standards:</b></p> <p>5 Govt/Regulators 2 Water Companies 2 Prof Bodies/Research Organisations 1 Library/Journal/Media</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Office of Public Sector <a href="http://www.opsi.gov.uk">www.opsi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>2. Anglian Water <a href="http://www.anglianwater.co.uk">www.anglianwater.co.uk</a></li> <li>3. Drinking Water Inspectorate <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>4. United Utilities <a href="http://www.unitedutilities.com">www.unitedutilities.com</a></li> <li>5. Foundation Water Research <a href="http://www.fwr.org">www.fwr.org</a></li> <li>6. Ingenta Connect <a href="http://www.ingentaconnect.com">www.ingentaconnect.com</a></li> <li>7. Royal Society Chemistry <a href="http://www.rsc.org">www.rsc.org</a></li> <li>8. DEFRA <a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk">www.defra.gov.uk</a></li> <li>9. Drinking Water Inspectorate <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>10. DWQ Reg Scotland <a href="http://www.dwqr.org.uk">www.dwqr.org.uk</a></li> </ol>
<p><b>drinking water safety:</b></p> <p>2 Academic Orgs. 2 Local Authorities 2 Prof Bodies/Res Orgs. 2 Library/Journal/Media 1 Govt/Regulator 1 Water Company</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drinking Water Inspectorate <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>2. Loughborough Uni <a href="http://www.lboro.ac.uk/">www.lboro.ac.uk/</a></li> <li>3. BBC News <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a></li> <li>4. IWA Publishing <a href="http://www.iwapublishing.com">www.iwapublishing.com</a></li> <li>5. West Wiltshire DC <a href="http://www.westwiltshire.gov.uk">www.westwiltshire.gov.uk</a></li> <li>6. Ingenta Connect <a href="http://www.ingentaconnect.com">www.ingentaconnect.com</a></li> <li>7. IWA Publishing <a href="http://www.iwapublishing.com">www.iwapublishing.com</a></li> <li>8. Dwr Cymru <a href="http://www.dwrcymru.co.uk">www.dwrcymru.co.uk</a></li> <li>9. Adur DC <a href="http://www.adur.gov.uk">www.adur.gov.uk</a></li> <li>10. Cranfield Uni <a href="http://www.cranfield.ac.uk">www.cranfield.ac.uk</a></li> </ol>
<p><b>drinking water regulator:</b></p> <p>4 Govt/Regulators 2 Prof Bodies 2 Library/Journal/Media 1 Water Company 1 Consumer Comparison</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DWQ Reg Scotland <a href="http://www.dwqr.org.uk">www.dwqr.org.uk</a></li> <li>2. Scottish Government <a href="http://www.scotland.gov.uk">www.scotland.gov.uk</a></li> <li>3. Holyrood publishing <a href="http://www.holyrood.com">www.holyrood.com</a></li> <li>4. IWA Publishing <a href="http://www.iwapublishing.com">www.iwapublishing.com</a></li> <li>5. Ofwat <a href="http://www.ofwat.gov.uk">www.ofwat.gov.uk</a></li> <li>6. Drinking Water Inspectorate <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>7. BBC <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a></li> <li>8. Water UK <a href="http://www.water.org.uk">www.water.org.uk</a></li> <li>9. Uswitch <a href="http://www.uswitch.com">www.uswitch.com</a></li> <li>10. Portsmouth Water <a href="http://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk">www.portsmouthwater.co.uk</a></li> </ol>
<p><b>how safe is my tap water?</b></p> <p>3 Govt/Regulators 2 Commercial Orgs. 1 Consumer Review 1 Q&amp;A Online Forum 1 Library/Journal/Media 1 Local Authority 1 Water Company</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drinking Water Inspectorate <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>2. NHS Direct <a href="http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk">www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk</a></li> <li>3. Ciao shopping <a href="http://www.ciao.co.uk/Brita">www.ciao.co.uk/Brita</a></li> <li>4. NHS Clinical Knowledge <a href="http://www.cks.library.nhs.uk">www.cks.library.nhs.uk</a></li> <li>5. The Fit Map (forum) <a href="http://www.thefitmap.co.uk">www.thefitmap.co.uk</a></li> <li>6. Yahoo Answers <a href="http://www.uk.answers.yahoo.com">www.uk.answers.yahoo.com</a></li> <li>7. Daily Telegraph <a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk">www.telegraph.co.uk</a></li> <li>8. Cotswold DC <a href="http://www.cotswold.gov.uk">www.cotswold.gov.uk</a></li> <li>9. Contact Lenses <a href="http://www.contactlenses.co.uk">www.contactlenses.co.uk</a></li> <li>10. Severn Trent Water <a href="http://www.stwater.co.uk">www.stwater.co.uk</a></li> </ol>

Search Phrase	Top Ten Hits
<p><b>who tests my tap water?</b></p> <p>3 Library/Journal/Media  3 Commercial Orgs  (Water filter, Pet, Garden)  2 Govt/Regulators  1 Water company  1 Local Authority</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practical Fishkeeping <a href="http://www.practicalfishkeeping.co.uk">www.practicalfishkeeping.co.uk</a></li> <li>2. Drinking Water Inspectorate <a href="http://www.dwi.gov.uk">www.dwi.gov.uk</a></li> <li>3. Daily Telegraph <a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk">www.telegraph.co.uk</a></li> <li>4. Anglian Water <a href="http://www.anglianwater.co.uk">www.anglianwater.co.uk</a></li> <li>5. St Albans DC <a href="http://www.stalbans.gov.uk">www.stalbans.gov.uk</a></li> <li>6. Pets Parade <a href="http://www.petsparade.co.uk">www.petsparade.co.uk</a></li> <li>7. Calypso (environ) <a href="http://www.calypso.org.uk">www.calypso.org.uk</a></li> <li>8. Government News Network <a href="http://www.gnn.gov.uk">www.gnn.gov.uk</a></li> <li>9. Brita Water <a href="http://www.instantbrita.co.uk">www.instantbrita.co.uk</a></li> <li>10. BBC News <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a></li> </ol>

### 3.3 Water company website evaluation

This research evaluated the following 25 water companies in England and Wales. It should be noted that for the purposes of this research Mid Kent and South East Water were assessed separately, as were Anglian and Hartlepool, and Essex and Suffolk and Northumbrian Water. As mentioned previously Albion Water does not form part of the research.

1	Anglian Water Services Ltd (includes Hartlepool Water) <a href="http://www.anglianwater.co.uk">www.anglianwater.co.uk</a>
2	Bournemouth & West Hampshire Water plc <a href="http://www.bwhwater.co.uk">www.bwhwater.co.uk</a>
3	Bristol Water Group Ltd <a href="http://www.bristolwater.co.uk">www.bristolwater.co.uk</a>
4	Cambridge Water plc <a href="http://www.cambridge-water.co.uk">www.cambridge-water.co.uk</a>
5	Cholderton & District Water Company <a href="http://www.choldertonwater.co.uk">www.choldertonwater.co.uk</a>
6	Dee Valley Water plc <a href="http://www.deevalleygroup.com">www.deevalleygroup.com</a>
7	Dwr Cymru Welsh Water <a href="http://www.dwrcymru.co.uk">www.dwrcymru.co.uk</a>
8	Essex & Suffolk Water <a href="http://www.eswater.co.uk">www.eswater.co.uk</a>
9	Folkestone & Dover Water Services Ltd <a href="http://www.fdws.co.uk">www.fdws.co.uk</a>
10	Hartlepool Water <a href="http://www.hartlepoolwater.co.uk">www.hartlepoolwater.co.uk</a>
11	Mid Kent Water Ltd (South East Water) <a href="http://www.midkentwater.co.uk">www.midkentwater.co.uk</a>
12	Northumbrian Water Group plc (includes Essex and Suffolk Water) <a href="http://www.nwl.co.uk">www.nwl.co.uk</a>
13	Portsmouth Water Ltd <a href="http://www.portsmouthwater.co.uk">www.portsmouthwater.co.uk</a>
14	Severn Trent plc <a href="http://www.stwater.co.uk">www.stwater.co.uk</a>
15	South East Water Ltd <a href="http://www.southeastwater.co.uk">www.southeastwater.co.uk</a>
16	South Staffs Water plc <a href="http://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk">www.south-staffs-water.co.uk</a>
17	South West Water Ltd <a href="http://www.southwestwater.co.uk">www.southwestwater.co.uk</a>
18	Southern Water <a href="http://www.southernwater.co.uk">www.southernwater.co.uk</a>
19	Sutton and East Surrey Water plc <a href="http://www.waterplc.com">www.waterplc.com</a>
20	Tendring Hundred Water Services Ltd <a href="http://www.thws.co.uk">www.thws.co.uk</a>
21	Thames Water plc <a href="http://www.thames-water.com">www.thames-water.com</a>
22	Three Valleys Water plc <a href="http://www.3valleys.co.uk">www.3valleys.co.uk</a>
23	United Utilities plc <a href="http://www.unitedutilities.com">www.unitedutilities.com</a>
24	Wessex Water Services Ltd <a href="http://www.wessexwater.co.uk">www.wessexwater.co.uk</a>
25	Yorkshire Water Services Ltd <a href="http://www.yorkshirewater.com">www.yorkshirewater.com</a>

#### 3.3.1 Finding water company websites

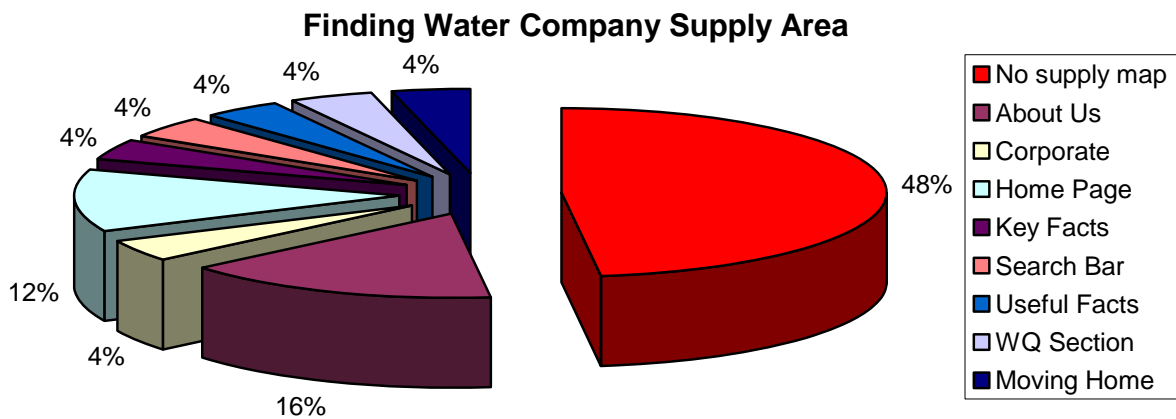
In searches for individual water companies using the Google search engine 'pages from the UK' 24 out of 25 water companies appeared as the top result.

Cholderton and District appeared 2<sup>nd</sup> after [www.water-guide.org.uk/cholderton-water.html](http://www.water-guide.org.uk/cholderton-water.html).

### 3.3.2 Establishing water company supply areas

Each water company website was examined to assess how easy it was for new customers to establish which water company supplied their water.

Just over half of the water companies showed their water supply area in an easily accessible location as shown in the chart below and detailed in the following table:

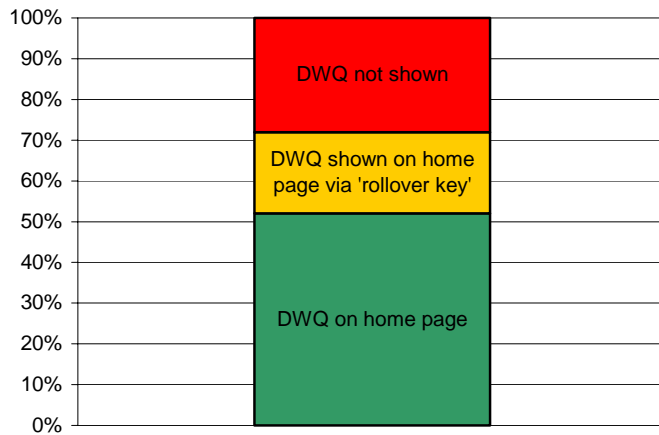





😊	😞
Water supply map clearly accessible	Water Supply map not easily located
Anglian	Cholderton
Bournemouth & West Hampshire	Dee Valley
Bristol	Dwr Cymru
Cambridge Water	Essex & Suffolk
Folkestone & Dover	Mid Kent
Hartlepool	Northumbrian
Portsmouth	Severn Trent
Southern	South East
South Staffs	South West
Tendring Hundred	Sutton & East Surrey
Thames	United Utilities
Three Valleys	Yorkshire
Wessex	

### 3.3.3 Visibility of DWQ information from companies' website home pages

72% of water companies (18 WCs) provide access to drinking water quality information from their home pages. Of those that do, 20% or 5 WCs provide access by rolling the cursor over other information), as shown in the graph and tables below.





### Drinking Water Quality Visibility from Home Page



 <b>DWQ visibility from home page</b>	 <b>DWQ visibility via 'rollover key'</b>
Anglian Bournemouth & West Hampshire Bristol Cambridge Water Dwr Cymru Essex & Suffolk Hartlepool Northumbrian Portsmouth Severn Trent South Staffs Sutton & East Surrey Wessex	Dee Valley Folkestone & Dover Mid Kent South East Three Valleys
	 <b>DWQ not shown on home page</b>
	Cholderton * Southern South West Tendring Hundred Thames United Utilities Yorkshire

For the 7 WCs shown in the table above who do not provide access to drinking water quality information from their web site home page, access to drinking water quality information can be found by navigating as follows:

*Note: \* It is understood that Wessex Water undertake sampling on behalf of Cholderton, however this is not clear from Cholderton's website.*

Water company	Number of clicks	Navigation
	n/a	No drinking water quality information
	2 *	Home Page / Home and Leisure / Drinking Water Quality
	3 *	Home Page / Did you know? / Environmental / Drinking Water
	2	Home Page / About Us / At Home Water Quality
	4 or 2	Home Page / Community & Environment / Learn about water / Drinking Water Quality Home Page / Your Home / Drinking Water Quality
	2	Home Page / Home Customers / Drinking Water Quality
	2 **	Home Page / Your Home / Drinking Water Quality




\*It was noted that there is a search bar on the home page, however entering the term "drinking water quality" produces many results and does not just take you to the relevant pages.

\*\* Drinking water quality information can also be found from the home page by using the postcode search.

### 3.3.4 Contacting water companies for further information




Web sites were assessed to establish how easily customers could find contact details for further enquiries about the quality of their water from 'within the water quality pages'.

The researcher could not find water quality contact details from within the water quality pages for the following 7 water companies:

-  Essex & Suffolk
-  Mid Kent
-  Northumbrian
-  Severn Trent
-  South East
-  South Staffs
-  Thames

### 3.3.5 'Area specific' water quality information

Just over 50% of water companies provide local 'area specific' water quality information as shown in the table below:

 Area Specific Downloads Available	Search by	Date of data	 Limited Area Specific Downloads (Hardness only)
Anglian	P	2007	Three Valleys (PC, n/c)
Bournemouth & West Hants	M	2006	
Cambridge Water	M	2006	
Dee Valley	P,M	n/c	
Portsmouth	M	2007	
Severn Trent	P	n/c	
Southern	P	2006	
South Staffs	P,M	2006	
Sutton & East Surrey	P,M	2006	
Thames	P	2006	
United Utilities	P	2007	
Yorkshire	P	2006	
			 Area Specific Downloads Not Available
			Bristol
			Cholderton *
			Dwr Cymru
			Essex & Suffolk
			Folkestone & Dover
			Hartlepool
			Mid Kent
			Northumbrian
			South East
			South West
			Tendring Hundred
			Wessex

M = Map search  
 P = Post code search  
 PM = map or post code search  
 nc = date not clearly shown

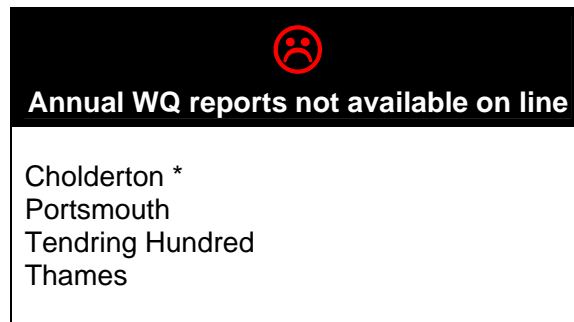
\* Refer to note on page 20

Of those companies listed above who provide full or partial area specific water quality reports from their websites, 7 provide this via a postcode search; 3 via a map search and 3 provide options for both post code and map search, as identified in the table above.

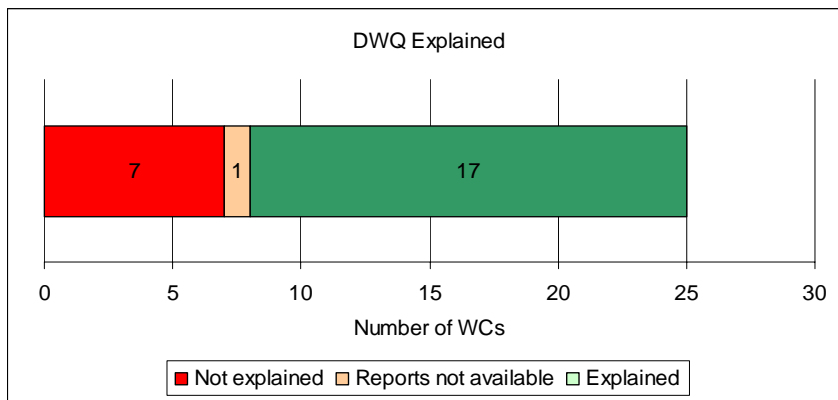
Three companies provided 2007 data, 7 showed 2006 data and for 2 companies it was not clear what the date was.

**3.3.6 Annual general water quality reports**

19 water companies provided access to downloadable annual water quality reports for 2006. Two water companies may have provided access but this could not be verified as the link did not work when tested on several occasions (Mid Kent and South East Water). Annual water quality reports could not be found on-line for the 4 following water companies:







**3.3.7 Making sense of water quality data**






The graph to the left shows 17 companies' web sites provided an explanation to drinking water reports and standards. The table below shows the detail of which companies explain standards.

\* Refer to note on page 20

 <b>Explanation of Standards</b>	 <b>N/A</b>	
Anglian Bournemouth & West Hampshire Bristol Cambridge Water Dwr Cymru Folkestone & Dover Hartlepool Northumbrian Portsmouth Severn Trent Southern South Staffs Sutton & East Surrey Thames Three Valleys United Utilities Wessex	Cholderton *	
	<th>   <b>No clear explanation found</b> </th>	 <b>No clear explanation found</b>
	Dee Valley Essex & Suffolk Mid Kent South East South West Tendring Hundred Yorkshire	

### 3.3.8 Water quality key facts

-  Only 3 companies did not provide drinking water quality fact sheets or frequently asked question and answers. (Cholderton \*, Hartlepool and South West)
-  The remaining 22 companies all provided some level of information.
-  Five of the 22 companies were perceived to have comprehensive water quality fact sheets (Anglian, Severn Trent, Thames, United Utilities and Wessex).

\* Refer to note on page 20

### 3.4 Water Company Research

#### 3.4.1 Requests for water quality report by telephone

All 25 water companies in this study were contacted by telephone and a request made for a water quality report for a postcode district within their supply area. On each occasion it was made clear that the caller did not live in the area.

##### 3.4.1.1 Cost of calls to customers

The following five companies call centres provided 'free' 0800 calls for customers. The remainder offered national and non-geographic telephone numbers. No companies had premium numbers:

- ☺ Dwr Cymru
- ☺ Severn Trent
- ☺ South Staffs
- ☺ South West
- ☺ United Utilities

##### 3.4.1.2 Response time from telephone call to receipt of report

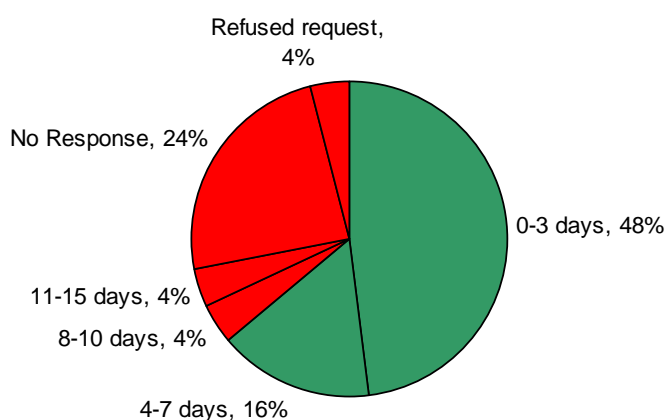
The chart to the right shows the number of working days from date of phone call to *delivery date*. Reports were requested to be sent by email where possible.

Just under 50% (12) WCs responded in less than 3 days.

A further 16% (4) responded within the 7 day deadline, as stated in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations for 2000 (England) and 2001 (Wales) and 2007 amendment, giving an overall 64% compliance.







32% (8 WCs) failed to meet the statutory requirement.

One company refused to send a report by post to an address out of their area, even though the information was in the public domain and available on their Internet site (see section 3.5.2.1 Barriers/Difficulties).



Receipt of one company's report took 13 days, but this was exacerbated by the unpaid postage and surcharge imposed by the post office (see section 3.5.2.2 Barriers/Difficulties Section).

24% (6 companies) who were telephoned have failed to provide a water quality report at all.

<b>Response Time</b>					
 <b>0-3 days</b>	 <b>4-7 days</b>	 <b>8-10 days</b>	 <b>11-15 days</b>	 <b>No Response</b>	 <b>Refused request</b>
Northumbrian (1)	Bristol (4)	Three Valleys (10)	Tendring Hundred (13)	Cholderton *	South Staffs
Southern (1)	Dwr Cymru (4)			Folkestone & Dover	
Sutton & East Surrey (1)	Essex & Suffolk (4)			Portsmouth	
Yorkshire (1)	Anglian (6)			Severn Trent	
Bournemouth & West Hampshire				South West	
Dee Valley (2)				United Utilities	
Hartlepool (2)					
South East (2)					
Thames (2)					
Wessex (2)					
Mid Kent (2)					
Cambridge (3)					
<b>Totals</b> 12	4	1	1	6	1

*Note: Numbers in brackets after the named water companies above show the number of days companies took to respond*

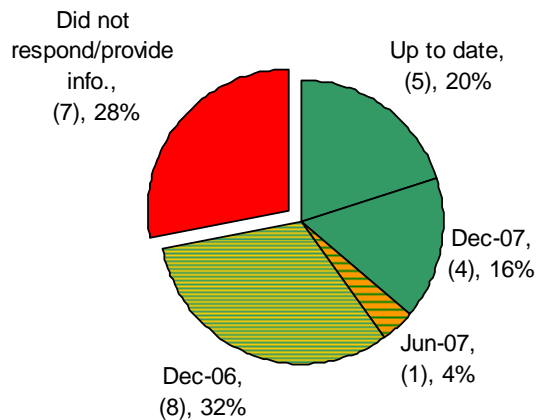
### 3.4.1.3 Charge for non-customers

The regulations state that companies may impose a charge for information to non-customers; however none of the companies who responded imposed a charge.

\* Refer to note on page 20

### 3.4.1.4 Date of water quality report






The chart (right) and table below shows that 5 companies (20%) provided a water quality report which was up to date.



A further 4 were dated end December 2007.

One company's data was dated end June 2007,




8 companies (32%) provided data consistent with that reported to DWI, namely to end December 2006.

 Up-to-date information	 Dec-07	 Jun-07	 Dec-06	 Did not respond/ provide info.
Bristol	Bournemouth & West Hants	Anglian	Cambridge Water	Cholderton *
Dwr Cymru	Northumbrian		Dee Valley	Folkestone & Dover
Essex & Suffolk	Tendring Hundred		Hartlepool	Portsmouth
Three Valleys	Wessex		South East	Severn Trent
Mid Kent			Southern	South Staffs
			Sutton & East Surrey	South West
			Thames	United Utilities
			Yorkshire	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

### 3.4.1.5 Explanation of standards




Although water companies were not asked to provide an explanation of what the results meant, it was noted that half of the 18 companies who responded took the opportunity to send an explanation, as illustrated in the table below:

\* Refer to note on page 20

 Explanation of Standards	 No explanation of Standards	 Did not respond /send report
Anglian	Bournemouth & West Hants	Cholderton *
Bristol	Dee Valley	Folkestone & Dover
Cambridge Water	Dwr Cymru	Portsmouth
Essex & Suffolk	Hartlepool	Severn Trent
Mid Kent	Northumbrian	South Staffs
South East	Sutton & East Surrey	South West
Southern	Tendring Hundred	United Utilities
Thames	Wessex	
Three Valleys	Yorkshire	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>

#### 3.4.1.6 Explanation that data is available on the Internet

Of the 12 companies who provide access to local water quality information for customers on their website (see section 3.3.5), only the following three companies took the opportunity to mention this during the telephone call.

-  Anglian
-  South Staffs
-  Yorkshire

#### 3.4.1.7 Safety of quality of water assured

Only 4 companies out of the 18 who responded took the opportunity in either the water quality report or accompanying letter to assure the customer of the safety of their water, as detailed in the following table:

\* Refer to note on page 20

Company	Assurance text	Where found
Anglian 😊	"Overall, drinking water quality for the Fakenham supply zone is excellent"	DWQ Summary Report
Dwr Cymru 😊	"Your water supply fully complied with the Regulation standards during this period." "Let me assure you that your water supply in this area is safe for drinking and food production purposes..."	Letter
Thames 😊	"Excellent quality water, no infringements to report"	WQ Report Commentary
Yorkshire 😊	"Samples taken in the period showed that the water complied in all respects with the prescribed standards"	WQ Report Commentary

#### 3.4.1.8 Completeness of company's response/customer feel good factor

This factor takes into account how the customer felt when the response was received. Positive factors considered were whether:

- there was an assurance given that the water was safe
- an explanation of what the standards meant was included with the report
- a name and contact number was given, together with an offer to approach them for further information
- there was an explanation in the communication of what was enclosed
- the letter was correctly addressed and dated
- there was any additional material provided, such as a WQ annual report/fact sheets etc

Negative factors taken into account included whether:

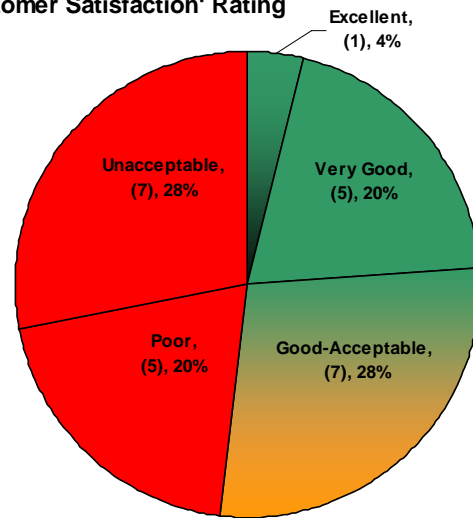
- the response letter/email was accurate (ie the report and other documents attached matched the description in the communication)
- the customer suffered detriment as a result of receiving the communication (eg unpaid postage (see section 3.5.2.2)).






Taking the above factors into consideration the companies' responses have been scored and ranked from a 'customer satisfaction' viewpoint.

The chart (right) shows that just over half 52% (13 companies) have achieved an acceptable to excellent rating.

The following table shows the detail of which companies were ranked to the categories mentioned above:

'Customer Satisfaction' Rating



<b>Customer Satisfaction Rating:</b>					
					
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>OK-Acceptable</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Unacceptable</b>	
Anglian	Thames	Bournemouth & West Hants	Southern	Cholderton *	
	Dwr Cymru	Bristol	Tendring Hundred	Folkestone & Dover	
	Essex & Suffolk	Dee Valley	Wessex	Portsmouth	
	Mid Kent	Three Valleys	Northumbrian	Severn Trent	
	South East	Yorkshire	Sutton & East Surrey	South Staffs	
		Cambridge Water		South West	
		Hartlepool		United Utilities	
<b>Totals</b>	1	5	7	5	7

\* Refer to note on page 20

**3.4.2 Requests for water quality report by web form/email**

Where downloads were not available on company web sites, a request was made using the website 'contact us' form or, if this was not provided, by email.

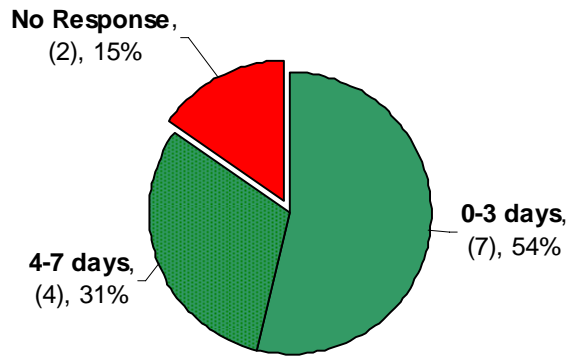
This section therefore relates to the following 13 companies. It should however be noted that in Three Valleys, limited water quality information is available for hardness levels:

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Bristol            | Cholderton *    |
| Dwr Cymru          | Essex & Suffolk |
| Folkestone & Dover | Hartlepool      |
| Mid Kent           | Northumbrian    |
| South East         | South West      |
| Tending Hundred    | Three Valleys   |
| Wessex             |                 |

**3.4.2.1 Response time from electronic request to receipt of report**

From the 13 companies requested by web form or email for water quality reports, 2 companies did not respond.

The remaining 11 companies all responded within the required 7-day deadline as shown in the chart (right) and table below:



😊😊	😊	😞😞
0-3 days	4-7 days	No Response
Bristol (1)	South East (4)	Cholderton *
Essex & Suffolk (1)	South West (4)	Mid Kent
Folkestone & Dover (1)	Tending Hundred (4)	
Hartlepool (1)	Dwr Cymru (5)	
Wessex (1)		
Northumbrian (2)		
Three Valleys (2)		
Totals	7	4
		2

\* Refer to note on page 20

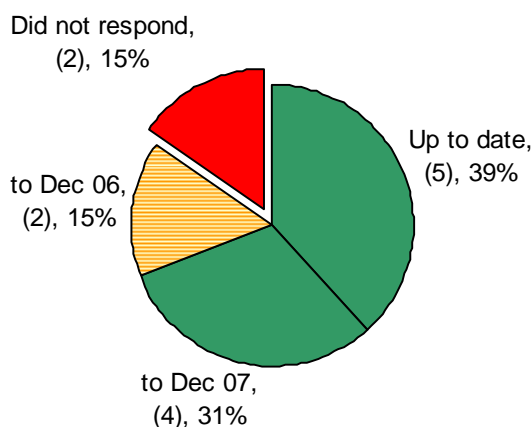
### 3.4.2.2 Charge for non-customers

As for the requests by telephone, none of the companies who responded to requests by web form/email imposed a charge for the water quality report.

### 3.4.2.3 Date of water quality report

The chart right and table below shows that 5 companies provided a water quality report which was right up to date. A further 4 were dated end December 2007.

2 companies provided data consistent with that reported to DWI, namely to the end of December 2006.



Water Quality Report Data Date			
😊😊	😊	😐	😞😞
Up to date	to Dec 07	to Dec 06	Did not respond
Bristol	Essex & Suffolk	Hartlepool	Cholderton *
Dwr Cymru	Folkestone & Dover	South East	Mid Kent
Northumbrian	Tendring Hundred		
South West	Wessex		
Three Valleys			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>

### 3.4.2.4 Explanation of standards

Although water companies were not asked to provide an explanation of what the results meant, it was noted that just over half provided this, as detailed in the table below:

😊 Explained standards	😞 Standard not explained	😞 Did not respond
Bristol	Dwr Cymru	Cholderton *
Essex & Suffolk	Hartlepool	Mid Kent
Folkestone & Dover	Northumbrian	
South East	Tendring Hundred	
South West	Wessex	
Three Valleys		
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

\* Refer to note on page 20

**3.4.2.5 Safety of quality assured**

None of the companies took the opportunity to assure the recipient of the quality of the water.

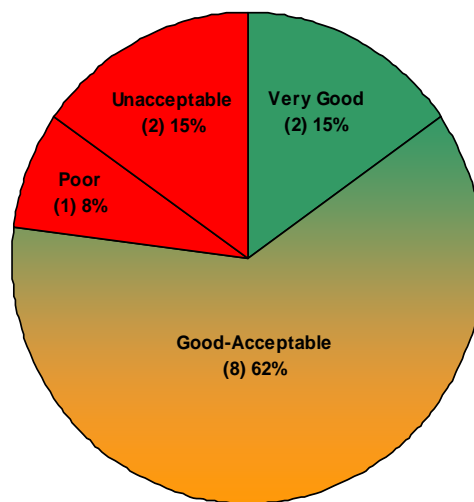
**3.4.2.6 Completeness of company’s response/customer feel good factor**

The factors considered for this category are the same as for requests for reports by telephone (see section 3.4.1.8)

The chart to the right shows that over three quarters of the companies’ responses were ranked in the acceptable to very good categories. Note that there were no companies scored in the excellent range.

The table below shows the detail of which companies were ranked to the categories mentioned above.

**'Customer Satisfaction'  
for web form/email requests**



<b>Customer Satisfaction Rating:</b>					
Excellent	Very Good	OK-Acceptable	Poor	Unacceptable	
	Three Valleys	Bristol	South West	Cholderton *	
	South East	Essex & Suffolk		Mid Kent	
		Folkestone & Dover			
		Tendring Hundred			
		Wessex			
		Dwr Cymru			
		Hartlepool			
		Northumbrian			
<b>Totals</b>	0	2	8	1	2

\* Refer to note on page 20

### **3.4.3 Differences between responses**

This section compares and contrasts differences between responses when requested by telephone, web form/email and reports downloaded from the Internet.

#### **3.4.3.1 Quality**

Generally there was little significant difference in the quality of reports received by email, downloaded or posted with the exception of two instances:

Cambridge Water's downloaded report was not formatted well, as mentioned in the web site barriers (see section 3.5.1.2)

Northumbrian's email response with attachment contained an htm file, which could not be read. This was followed up with a word document which was not formatted and could not be printed.

#### **3.4.3.2 Safety of quality of water assured**

Dwr Cymru took the opportunity to assure the recipient that the water supply was safe in a letter response to a telephone call; however it did not do so in the email response to the web form request.

#### **3.4.3.3 Date of data**

There were two instances where the currency of company's data varied:

Bournemouth and West Hants provided data which was one year more up to date (to end December 2007) when responding by letter to a phone call request, compared to their downloadable report which was dated December 2006.

Northumbrian's email response to a web form request resulted in a water quality report which was right up to date, compared to information dated December 2007 which was sent in response to the request made by telephone.

### 3.5 Barriers and obstacles encountered

This section identifies instances which hindered the process of searching and gathering information for both the web site and the 'mystery shop' research



#### 3.5.1 Website barriers

##### 3.5.1.1 Bournemouth & West Hampshire

Information is not being updated regularly enough. A search in March 2008 for DWI reports on BWH's web site was showing out-of-date information for 2002.



(It has been noted that this has now been updated.)



In addition the map is a little difficult to read and would benefit from having a few more areas clearly identified.

### 3.5.1.2 Cambridge

Although Cambridge Water's website has good information and is easy to use, downloads for both the water quality report and drinking water standards are not printer-friendly.

The 'Standards Explained' document to the right has much information missing. For example under the 'Qualitative Taste' section only 9 words can be seen. Whilst in the excel spreadsheet the following appears under the cell:

Drinking water quality - the standards explained		
Units of measurement	1 mg/l (milligram/litre) is 1 part in 1,000,000	
	1 ug/l (microgram/litre) is 1 part in 1,000,000,000	
	1 ng/l (nanogram/litre) is 1 part in 1,000,000,000,000	
Substance or Parameter tested	What it means	Maximum concentration allowed.
pH	This is a measure of the acidity or alkalinity of the water	5.5 - 9.5
Colour	This is an aesthetic requirement. Water should be clear and bright, but may occasionally show a slight reddish or yellowish tint caused by iron from old iron mains. This is not harmful to health but can be a nuisance. There are major programmes under way to replace or re-line old mains.	20 Hazen units on colour scale
Turbidity	Sometimes water appears milky because of air bubbles. This is not harmful and if the water is left to stand for a few minutes it will clear from the water may smelt of chlorine. A small amount of chlorine is added to water before it leaves the treatment works to ensure that the water remains safe to drink.	4 Formazin turbidity units
Qualitative Odour		Samples are frequently checked and any significant odour is
Qualitative Taste		Samples are frequently
Dilution Odour		
Dilution Taste	These are quality control tests to measure the level of odour and taste and are carried out by specialist tasting panels.	Dilution number 3 at 25°C
Conductivity	By passing an electric current through the water, we can measure levels of mineral salts it contains.	2500 us/cm at 20°C
Total Hardness	The water we supply is hard. This is caused by the rocks through which the water has passed, eg chalk. This means that the water lathers less than with soft water. It has no adverse effects on health - indeed,	Standards only apply if water is softened.

*"If water has been standing in pipework for some hours it may have a flat, stale or metallic taste. It may help to flush the tap before taking water for drinking."*

### 3.5.1.3 Dee Valley

When drinking water quality information is accessed via 'Your Water Supply' (see figure right) then limited information of just four paragraphs is available and this is out-of-date water quality information for 2004.



There is a much more comprehensive section on water quality which can be accessed via the 'Other Services' section.

In this section the annual quality report for 2006 can be downloaded together with other water quality literature on topics such as hardness, fluoride and lead.

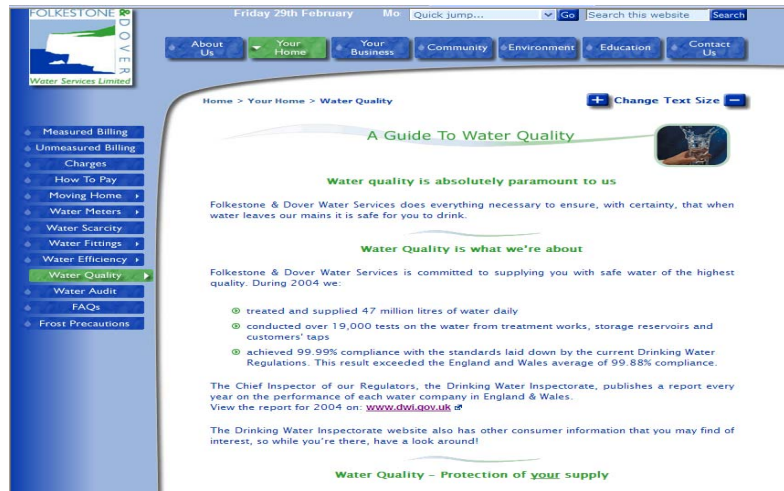
It is also possible in this section to check for specific quality reports by entering a post code to obtain the supply zone and then clicking on the supply zone.

There is no cross-reference from the out of date information in 'Your Water Supply' to the more comprehensive information contained in the 'Other Services' section which may mislead the customer into believing there is no water quality information available to download.

### 3.5.1.4 Folkestone & Dover

The water quality pages are not kept up to date regularly. An inspection in February 2008 found the following referring to DWI reports for 2004! Text states:

*“The Chief Inspector of our Regulators, the Drinking Water Inspectorate, publishes a report every year on the performance of each water company in England and Wales. View the report for 2004 on [www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk)”*

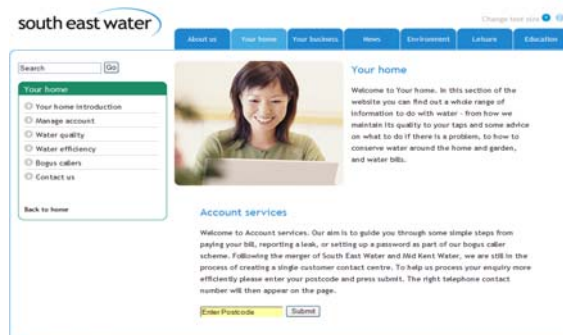


However a subsequent check in April 2008 found that the link to DWI reports had been brought up to date.

### 3.5.1.5 Mid Kent and South East

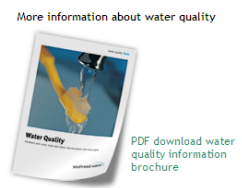
Although Mid Kent and South East Water have merged, there are still two separate customer centres, but one web site.

It was impossible to find a contact telephone number without a post code. After entering a valid post code in the 'Your Home' section a dialogue box appears showing the relevant contact telephone number for the customer centre as shown below.



Contact Us  
 Phone  
 0845 301 0845  
 Standard Opening Hours  
 Monday to Friday 8am - 7pm  
 Saturday 8am - 1pm

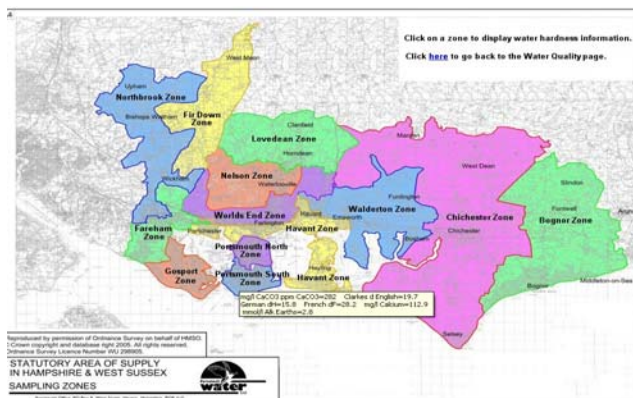
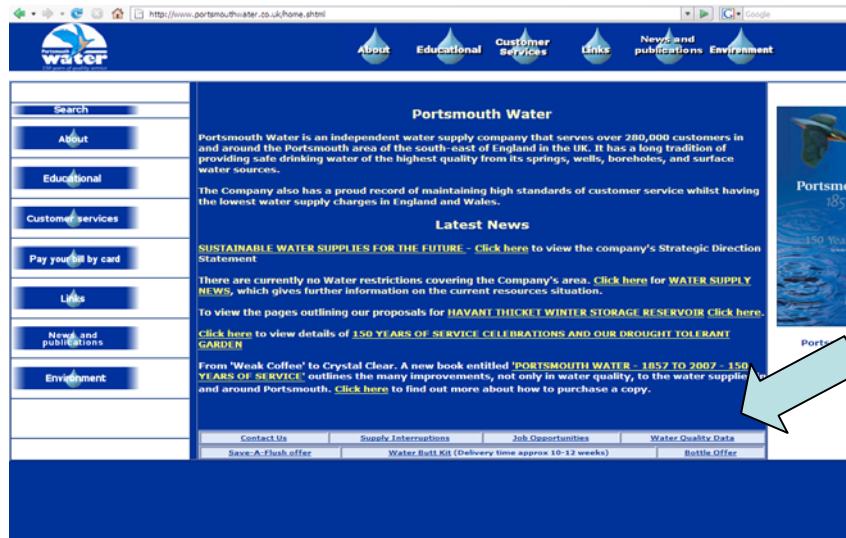
In addition the water quality information brochure (see right) did not download.



### 3.5.1.6 Portsmouth

Although WQ data appears on the home page, it is extremely difficult to find, as it is a very small box at bottom of the frame, and requires the user to scroll down before it is visible.

When this is accessed local WQ information is available to download but again this is not easily established.



The only way to find a full local water quality report is to click on the 'water quality data as above and a map then appears (see left). By clicking on a zone the user will be able to access the relevant levels of hardness.

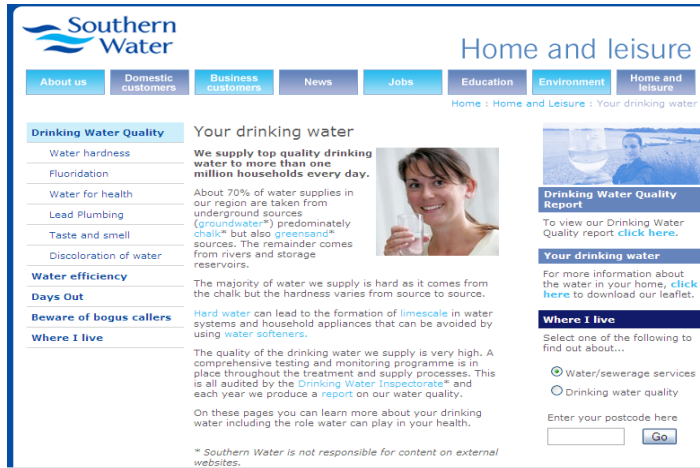
However below the hardness levels for the zone a further click will give a full water quality summary for the year 2006. This information was very nearly missed, as it was assumed that only hardness levels would be displayed, whereas a full water drinking water quality report was available



In addition there is some out-of date data in the Water Quality Standards section which states:

*"From January 2004 there will be a complete revision of sampling requirements and some parameters will no longer need to be monitored. More frequent sampling for certain parameters will take place at treatment works and in supply."*

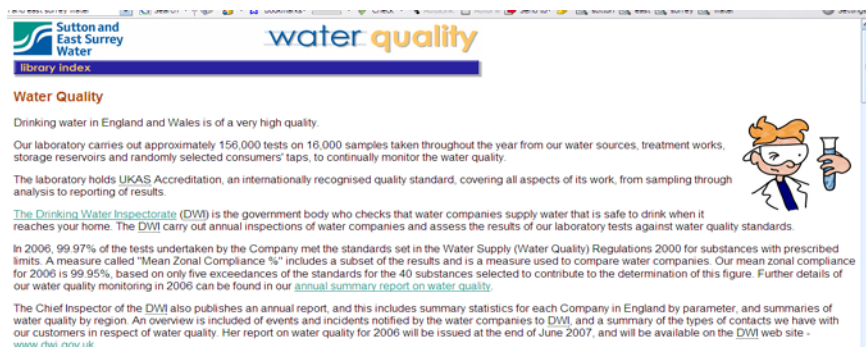
3.5.1.7 Southern



Southern Water's drinking water quality page invites water quality customers to click here to view the drinking water quality report, which unfortunately opens the complete 'reports and publications library' and not just water quality documents.

3.5.1.8 Sutton & East Surrey

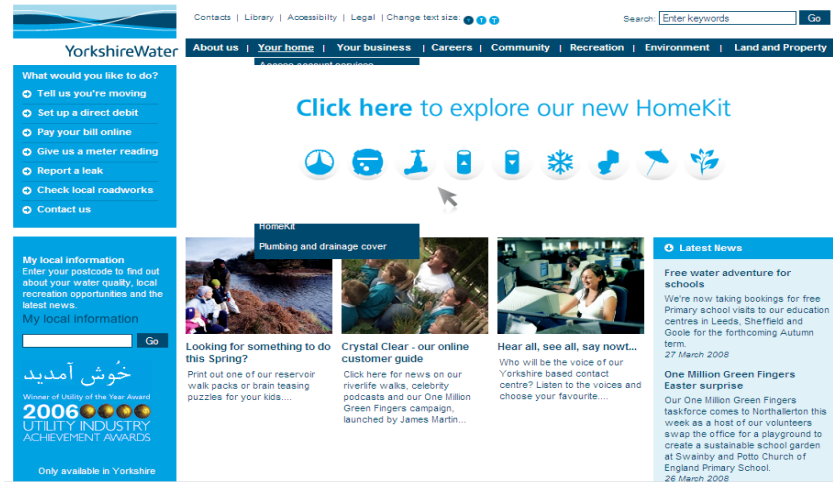
The water quality pages have not been updated. Some 10 months after June 2007 the following appears as reproduced in the text below:



*"The Chief Inspector of the DWI also publishes an annual report, and this includes summary statistics for each Company in England by parameter, and summaries of water quality by region. An overview is included of events and incidents notified by the water companies to DWI, and a summary of the types of contacts we have with our customers in respect of water quality. Her report on water quality for 2006 will be issued at the end of June 2007, and will be available on the DWI web site - [www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk)."*

### 3.5.1.9 Yorkshire

There is a formatting issue with Yorkshire Water's home page. A new pane appears to have been uploaded on to the home page relating to a 'New HomeKit' (see picture right). This prohibits the use of the top menu bar and 'rollover keys' at the top of the pane, thus obliterating the sub menus for 'Your Home' section where water quality information is found.



### 3.5.2 'Mystery shop' barriers

#### 3.5.2.1 Not an existing customer

One of the largest obstacles to gaining information was the fact that the caller was not an existing customer. The following 7 out of 25 companies approached by telephone did not ask the why the caller wanted the information

-  Anglian
-  Dwr Cymru
-  Folkestone & Dover
-  Portsmouth
-  Severn Trent
-  Sutton & East Surrey
-  United Utilities
-  Wessex

Not being an existing customer caused both problems and confusion for customer call centre staff in that many said they were unable to log the call without a confirmed address in their area. Some typical responses to the request were as follows:

*(Please note that as the telephone calls were not recorded the "quotes" below are **not** reproduced verbatim.)*

- ☹️ “I will have to find a random address in the postcode area in order to log the call” (Yorkshire)
- ☹️ “I need a particular property in the area in order to log the call” (Southern)
- ☹️ “I can only send a report to a customer. If you are buying a property I can send the report to existing owners and ask them to send it on to you” (South Staffordshire)
- ☹️ “You will need to write in and request one” (South East).
- ☹️ “You will need to email us” (Three Valleys)

One request for information which was made to Northumbrian supplied only an email address for the response. The company responded by email but also mentioned the following:

- ☹️ “I will also send a hard copy by post”

This would not be possible as only a postcode was given. The member of staff must have therefore ‘allocated the enquiry to a random property’. It should be noted that the post code is not unique to one property; the Royal Mail postcode-finder found 21 properties with the same post code.

### 3.5.2.2 Other barriers/difficulties encountered

- ☹️ Lack of Knowledge - When asked whether a search could be made on the Internet by post code or general area, the response was “I don’t know as I must admit I haven’t looked at the Internet for the company”. I suggested that she did so! (South Staffs)
- ☹️ “I will check with my boss and let you know whether we can send water quality reports”. No response has been received to the phone request despite following up with a web form request. - (Cholderton \*).
- ☹️ “The water quality department are not on the phone” - (South East)
- ☹️ Unpaid postage – One response was sent without postage requiring the recipient to pay a surcharge of £1.24, which had to be sent to the post office before the letter would be delivered. (Tendingr Hundred)

\* Refer to note on page 20

- ☹ Incorrectly addressed – One letter response misspelled the name, the first, second and third line of the address, including the town. (Bristol)
- ☹ Inaccuracies in letter – One letter response to a web form request contained the following 3 inaccuracies: (South West)
- “the Water Supply Zone in which you live”
    - an address in the area was not given
  - “The summary of results shows, for the year to end of December 2006.....”
    - report enclosed was up to date to March 2008
  - “.....Quality Matters. These reports are published in June each year.....this report refers to 2005”
    - report enclosed was dated 2006
- ☹ Undated report - The date of the data was not specified in the downloaded area-specific report (Severn Trent)
- ☹ Not understanding the regulation deadline - “You should receive the report within **10** working days” (Thames)


### 3.6 Comparison of web review study with 2006 mystery shop research

Although this research and the 'mystery shop' study in 2006 are not identical, there are some similarities for both web site research and mystery shop research. This section makes comparisons where possible to identify whether there have been improvements since that date.


#### 3.6.1 Website comparison

A comparison with the 2006 review of web sites (which excluded Cholderton and Tendring Hundred) shows the following:


- Access to DWQ information from Home Page:

 5 companies now provide access to drinking water quality from their Home Page:

Dee Valley  
Dwr Cymru  
South East  
Three Valleys  
Wessex


 2 companies that did not provide access from their home page have stayed the same:

South West  
Thames

 3 companies who previously provided access from their home page no longer do so:

Southern  
United Utilities  
Yorkshire


- Number of clicks to finding drinking water quality information

 8 companies have improved and now provide access by 'one click':

Bristol  
Dee Valley  
Dwr Cymru  
Essex & Suffolk  
Northumbrian  
Portsmouth  
South East  
Wessex

 One company, where access was via 3 clicks has stayed the same:

## South West

 4 companies where one click previously took customers to water quality information now require 2 clicks:

Southern

Thames

United Utilities




Yorkshire

### 3.6.2 'Mystery shop' comparison

It should be noted that this research was not identical to that carried out in the 2006 study. The major difference is that in the 2006 study each water company was approached by *letter* to provide a response to an individual drinking water quality query and to supply a drinking water quality report. For the 2008 study all water companies were telephoned with the same request; namely to provide a water quality report for a particular area.



As results from the 2006 study were assessed for their overall customer satisfaction, using similar categories to the 2008 research, the opportunity has been taken to compare outcomes.

The table below compares the 23 companies in the 2006 study (which excluded Cholderton and Tendring Hundred) and shows that:

-  6 companies have improved their customer satisfaction ratings
-  9 companies' satisfaction ratings were similar to the 2006 study
-  8 companies' customer satisfaction levels have dropped since the previous study

It should be noted that the customer satisfaction rating for Anglian has remained very high.

Other significant observations are:

-  Thames, which has moved from a poor rating to very good
-  Folkestone and Dover which has dropped from very high to not able to assess as no response has been received.

<b>Comparison of customer satisfaction levels 2006 vs 2008 research</b>			
<b>Company</b>	<b>2006 assessment</b>	<b>2008 assessment</b>	<b>Movement</b>
Anglian	1	1	=
Bournemouth & WH	1	2	↓
Folkestone & Dover	1	N/R	↓
Bristol	2	2	=
Cambridge Water	2	2	=
Dee Valley	2	2	=
Dwr Cymru	2	1	↑
Essex & Suffolk	2	1	↑
Hartlepool	2	2	=
Mid Kent	2	1	↑
Portsmouth	2	N/R	↓
South East	2	1	↑
South Staffs	2	N/R	↓
Southern	2	3	↓
Sutton & East Surrey	2	3	↓
United Utilities	2	N/R	↓
Wessex	2	3	↓
Yorkshire	2	2	=
Northumbrian	3	3	=
South West	3	N/R	=
Thames	3	1	↑
Three Valleys	3	2	↑
Severn Trent	N/R	N/R	=
Tendring Hundred	not in study	3	Not assessed
Cholderton	not in study	N/R	Not assessed

<b>Key</b>			
1	Very good	↑	improvement
2	Good-average	=	no change
3	Poor	↓	deterioration
NR	No response		

## **Section 4.0 Conclusions**

The following significant conclusions have been drawn from each of the four component parts of the study:

### **4.1 Local authorities**

- Local Authorities provide little, if any information on their web sites regarding drinking water quality

### **4.2 Searches for water related phrases**

- Government and Water Regulators feature in fairly high numbers on the results of the searches

### **4.3 Water company website evaluation**

- Customers cannot easily establish which company supplies their water
- Drinking water quality information was not always easily accessible from water company web site home pages
- Contact information was not always clearly available from within the drinking water quality pages
- Customers were not always provided with a customer centre telephone number in the 'contact us' section. Mid Kent only provide a web 'contact us' form. Having to enter a valid post code in order to find a telephone number of a water company prohibits contact by members of the public who are moving into their area.
- Not all water companies had provision for customers to access area specific drinking water quality results
- It was not always evident what date the drinking water quality reports were and on some occasions information was very out-of-date
- Some links within company web sites did not give clear results
- Not all water companies provided a clear explanation of what the drinking water quality reports parameters were or how to interpret them
- Not all information contained on the web site is formatted correctly for printing
- Drinking water quality information was sometimes found to be accessible from more than one menu and contained different information

### **4.4 Water Company 'mystery shop' requests by telephone and electronic**

- Water companies do not appear to be meeting their statutory obligations with regard to provision of information to customers within the 7 day deadline. A significant proportion (36%) of companies who were approached by telephone did not meet the deadline for responding, and 15% did not respond when contacted for information electronically.
- In each of the telephone and electronic studies, about 50% of companies explained to customers what the water quality reports meant, and only a handful of companies (4) took the opportunity in their responses to assure customers that their water was safe to drink

- Only just over half of the companies' (52%) responses to telephone enquiries gave the customer an acceptable to very good satisfaction level; whilst 77% of the responses to electronic requests were classified as acceptable to very good.
- It was difficult for potential customers to find information about the quality of water from water companies. In several water companies there was no process to log the calls or enquiries, or assign to a team without an address in their supply area. This could be one reason why many companies did not respond at all.

## **Section 5.0 Recommendations**

It is recommended that consideration be given to the following:

### **5.1 Local authorities**

- Local Authorities could provide a drinking water quality page, which is easily navigable /searchable from web site home pages. The page could provide simple generic fact sheets on drinking water together with a list of accountabilities and clear access to contact details for both DWI and local water companies. A link to both DWI and water company web sites would also be useful for customers

### **5.2 Searches for water related phrases**

- DWI should continue to monitor their position in the results for these and other water related phrases

### **5.3 Water company website evaluation**

- Water companies should ensure that their web site home pages have clear boundary maps which will help customers to identify which water company supplies their water
- All water companies should be encouraged to provide easier access to drinking water quality information directly from their home pages
- All water companies should be encouraged to provide details of how to contact the company by phone or email if further drinking water quality information is required
- Companies should have telephone contact numbers clearly shown in the contact us information pages of their web sites
- With the increase in customers using the Internet to search for information, all companies should be persuaded to provide access to local area-specific information
- All water quality reports should clearly show the date to which the information relates
- Water companies should check validity of web site content more frequently ensuring out-of-date content is updated or removed, and that the links work. Links to other parts of the website should be content specific and allow the customer instant access and not have to plough through pages of information for what they are looking for
- Water companies should explain to customers in layman terms how to interpret the technical water quality results
- All information available for customer download should be checked to ensure that it is formatted correctly and printer-friendly
- Drinking water quality information content should be cross-referenced so that a customer searching for information finds all the relevant information

#### **5.4 Water Company 'mystery shop' requests by telephone and electronic**

- Water companies should be reminded of their statutory obligation with regard to their response to customers, and ensure that their staff are trained to that effect
- When responding to customers enquires about the quality of their drinking water, or responding to a request for a drinking water quality report, companies should include an explanation of what is meant, and where possible reassure them that the water is safe to drink, or excellent quality/satisfactory etc
- Companies should reinforce to staff the importance of customer's perception and the need to gain more customer satisfaction. The quality and accuracy of their correspondence being a significant factor to 'how the customer feels' at the point when the communication is opened cannot be over-emphasised
- Water companies should be urged to consider ways of dealing with queries from potential customers, and not have to allocate the enquiry to a 'random property' within their area

## **Appendix 1– A brief guide to mystery shopping**

### **A1.1 What is Mystery Shopping?**

Mystery Shopping is a valuable tool that provides an accurate indication of the interaction between staff and customers.

It is a performance evaluation process that enables clients to examine measure and report on customer service standards by using researchers acting as if they were customers.

It is a fast and effective method of obtaining hard objective and soft subjective management data about customer service levels.

Mystery *calling* is used to check that staff are answering and dealing with queries correctly and portraying a professional image to customers.

### **A1.2 Why undertake a mystery shopper programme?**

- to monitor how well your staff deal with your customers
- customers may be reluctant to complain; as few as one dissatisfied customer in 10 bothers to complain. However previous customer research has identified that:
- one unhappy customer will tell 5 other people of their bad experience with service
- complaint and compliment monitoring can lead to a false sense of security if nine out of ten dissatisfied customers don't complain
- if you can't deliver when you say you will, or your telephone is constantly engaged, you have a fundamental customer service failure which clearly needs fixing as a high priority
- telephone answering times are irrelevant if the quality of the response is poor
- to identify trends to establish whether customer services levels are deteriorating, so that you know before your customers do
- corrective action takes time, as does regaining the confidence of customers. A continuous monitoring programme can help you detect and correct service shortfalls well before they become a problem
- mystery shoppers are particularly useful for making objective and subjective comparisons between your service and that of your competitors.

### **A1.3 What are the benefits of undertaking mystery shopping?**

Research shows that it is the *quality of human interaction* which has the greatest effect on customers' perception of a company. The benefits are:

- cost-effective method of monitoring your customer service standards
- an indication that there may be a need for further staff training
- a summary of strengths and weaknesses as an input to gap analysis and subsequent management action plan
- an effective deterrent against poor service or bad practice
- an indication of whether procedures are being followed

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