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The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Testing the Waters 2024:
Highlights report
November 2024

[ccw.org.uk](https://www.ccw.org.uk)



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Foreword

This is the fifth round of CCW's *Testing the Waters* research. The survey data stretches back to before the opening of the water retail market in England in April 2017, providing us with a wealth of comparative insight for tracking business customers' views on their water and sewerage providers, as well as their retailer.

The findings show there are many aspects of service that customers want to see improved.

Our [five-year review of the retail market](#) emphasised the importance of both wholesalers and retailers delivering greater benefits for their customers.

Back in May 2024, our Water Matters annual survey reported significant falls in satisfaction with water and sewerage services among household customers. This is not reflected in our survey of business customers.

However, similar to households, business customers were also far less likely to say that their water company cared about the service it provided than in previous years.

The report also shows that awareness of the wider retail market, while slowly continuing to rise, is still far too low more than seven years on from its launch. It's particularly concerning that a quarter of business customers still couldn't name their water retailer. This represents a wasted opportunity to inform and engage business customers on the potential benefits of the market, including providing them with advice and guidance on reducing their water use and helping them to save money off their bills.

There is much to reflect on from these findings. Retailers and wholesalers need to rise to the challenge and take action to ensure business customers benefit from the market.

Helen Brown
Director of Consumer Relations
CCW

Introduction

The biennial Testing the Waters surveys a representative sample of businesses in England and Wales. This report provides analysis of business customers' satisfaction with various aspects of their water, sewerage and retailer services in 2024, and provides a retrospective view on key trends over time.

In 2017, the water retail market in England was opened to all businesses, charities and public sector organisations, allowing them to choose their retailer for billing and customer support services. Since that point, CCW has been tracking awareness of and activity in the water retail market – details of which are included in this report.

Where applicable, comparisons are made between outcomes from the two previous surveys, conducted in 2020/21 and 2018.

In 2024, 2,000 interviews were completed with commercial businesses, charities and public sector organisations in England and Wales. In Wales, additional interviews were completed to allow for robust data comparisons.

Quotas were set on business size, sector and water company region. Following completion of fieldwork, data was weighted to match the profile of businesses in each water company region.

Market context

The 2024 survey was conducted between March and July 2024. During this period, there was extensive media coverage of the water industry across England and Wales, and a UK General Election on 4th July 2024.

In light of these media stories and events, the water industry is under more scrutiny from politicians, regulators and customers than has been the case in previous surveys, particularly those conducted in 2018 and 2020/21 during Covid.

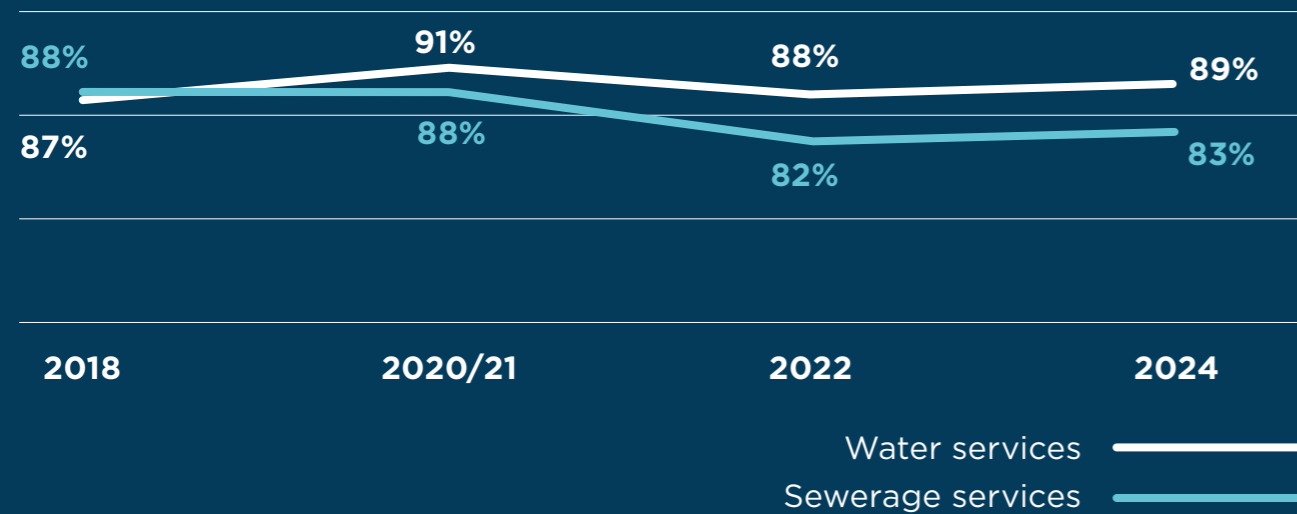
Despite this, business customers' satisfaction with the various elements of their water service (water, sewerage and retail services) remains largely unchanged from 2022, with little significant difference recorded in sentiment, interaction or relationship with providers.



Overall satisfaction

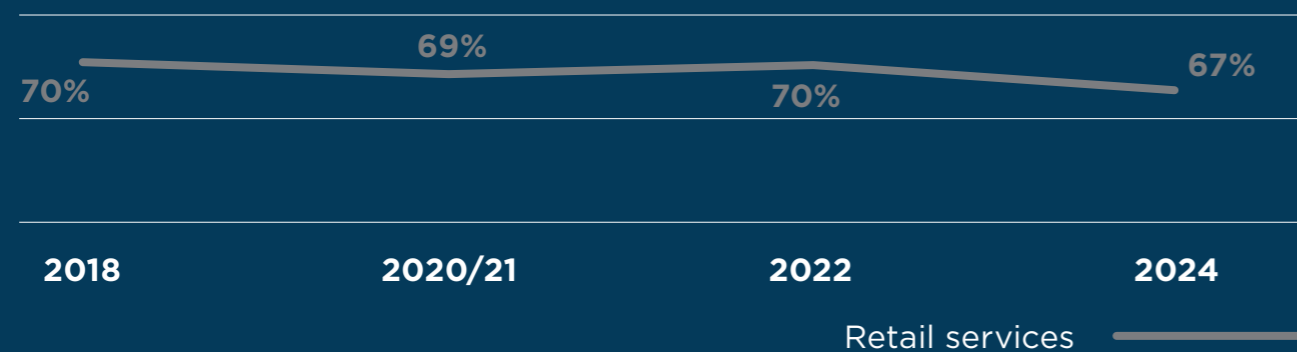
Overall satisfaction with water & sewerage services is unchanged from 2022:

Chart 1: % (net) satisfied with water & sewerage services over time



Similarly, overall satisfaction with retailer services is also (statistically) unchanged from 2022:

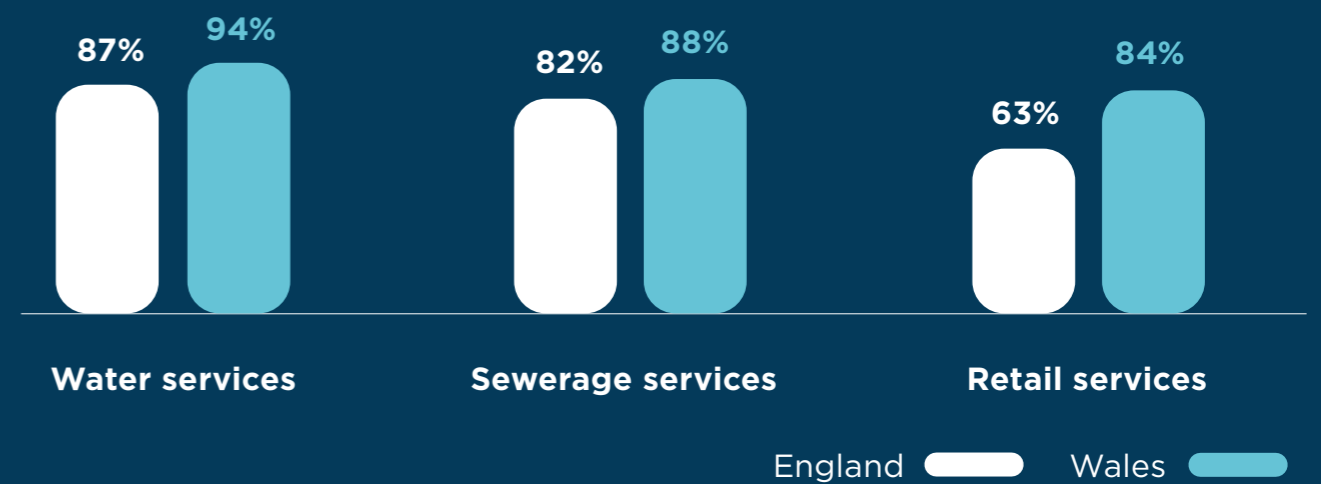
Chart 2: % (net) satisfied with retailer services over time (England and Wales)



England vs. Wales

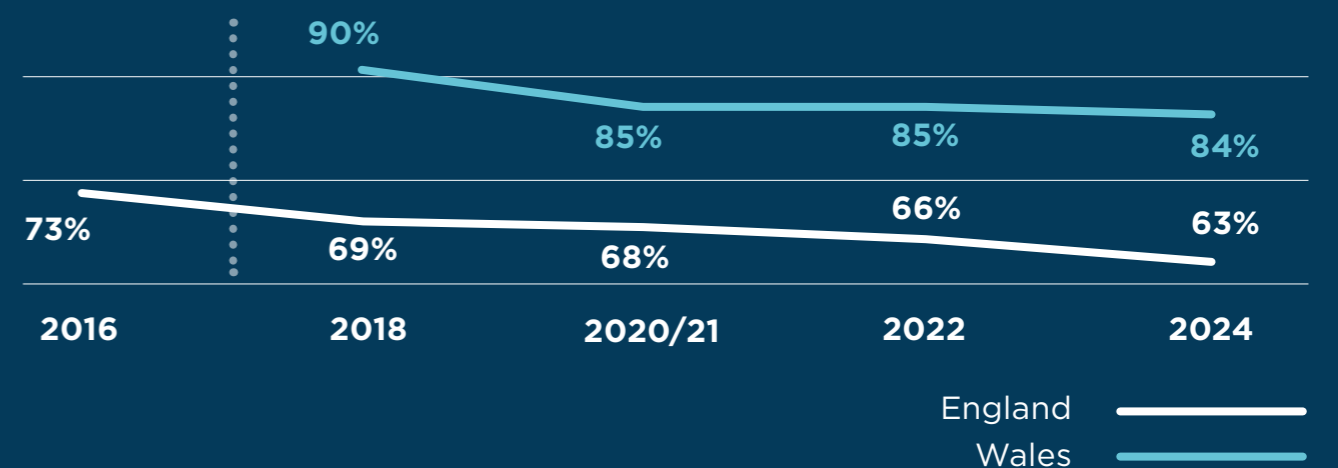
As has historically been the case, satisfaction with water, sewerage and retailer services is significantly higher in Wales than in England:

Chart 3: % (net) satisfied with water, sewerage and retail services 2024, England vs. Wales



Since the opening of the water retail market in **England** in 2017, **satisfaction with retailers has fallen in each cycle**, with less than two-thirds (63%) now satisfied. **By contrast, despite a fall between 2018 and 2020/21 in Wales, satisfaction levels have remained robust since the Covid-19 pandemic.**

Chart 4: % (net) satisfied with retailer services, England vs. Wales over time



Note: Water retail market for businesses in England opens in 2017. No data for water retail service satisfaction in Wales in 2016.

Overall satisfaction: reasons for dissatisfaction

Reasons for dissatisfaction ratings (2024):

Over a third (36%) of customers who are dissatisfied with their **retailer** mention inaccurate billing (up from 28% in 2022), while mentions of poor customer service (35%) are down from 44%.

In 2024, mentions of environmental concerns have come to the fore (16% in 2024, up from 4% in 2022) among those dissatisfied with their **sewerage services**.

For **water services**, issues around the rising cost of bills and water supply issues not being resolved (both 13%) are cited more frequently as reasons for dissatisfaction than in 2022 (both 5%).

Top three reasons for dissatisfaction: water, sewerage and retail services, 2024:

Water	Sewerage	Retail
35% Poor water quality (taste, smell, hardness etc.)	35% Problems with blockages	35% Inaccurate bills
22% Problems with water pressure	22% Problems with flooding (sewage overflow etc.)	35% Poor customer service
13% Cost/prices have risen/bills too expensive & water supply issues not resolved	17% Problems with drains	26% Meter readings wrong/not taken



Overall satisfaction: business size

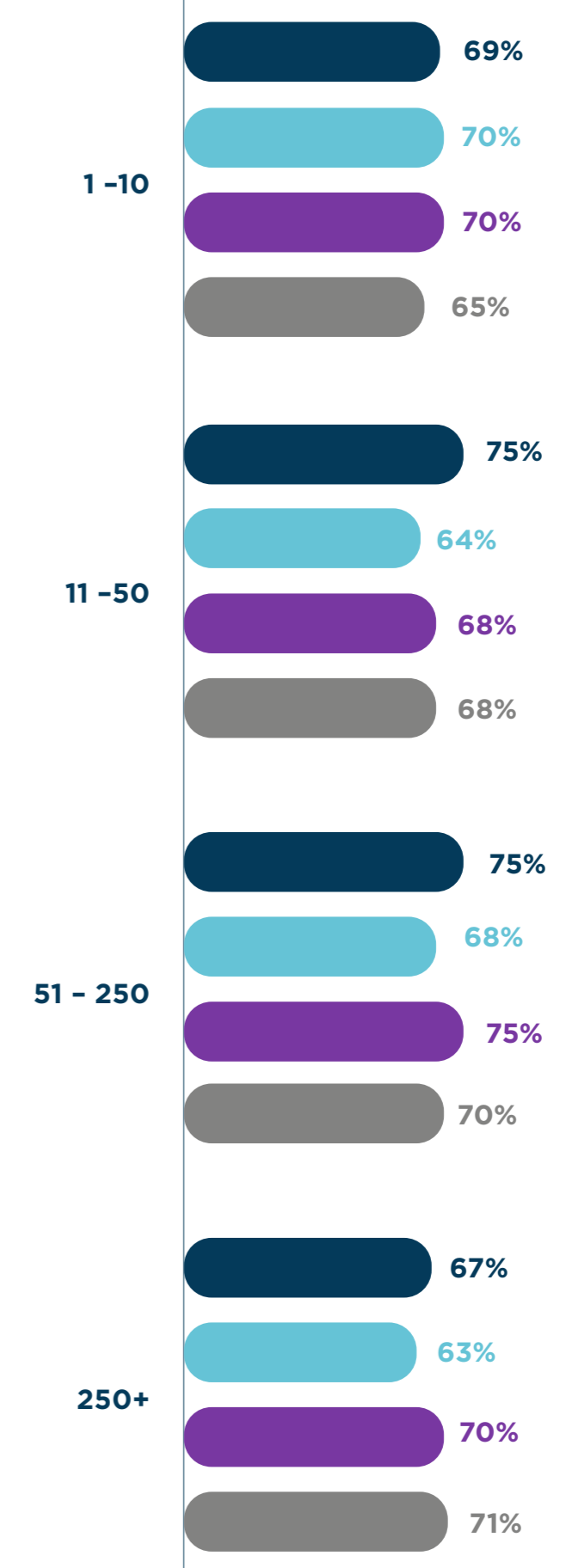
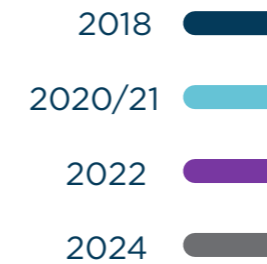
There are no significant differences in satisfaction with water or retail services by business size in 2024.

However, the largest businesses (250+ employees) are significantly less likely to be satisfied with their sewerage services (74%) than those with fewer than 250 employees (83%).

Over a longer-term view (when looking at retailers), there is no one business size group that is significantly more likely to be satisfied or dissatisfied.



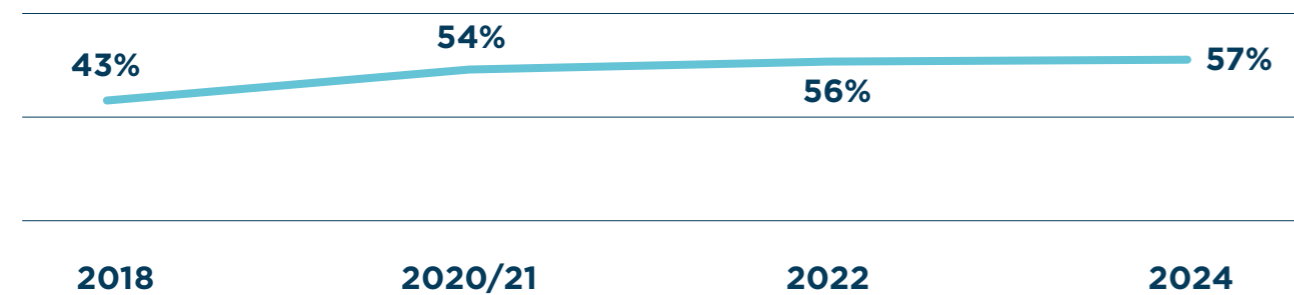
Chart 5: % (net) satisfied with water retail services, business size (number of employees) over time



Awareness of the water retail market in England

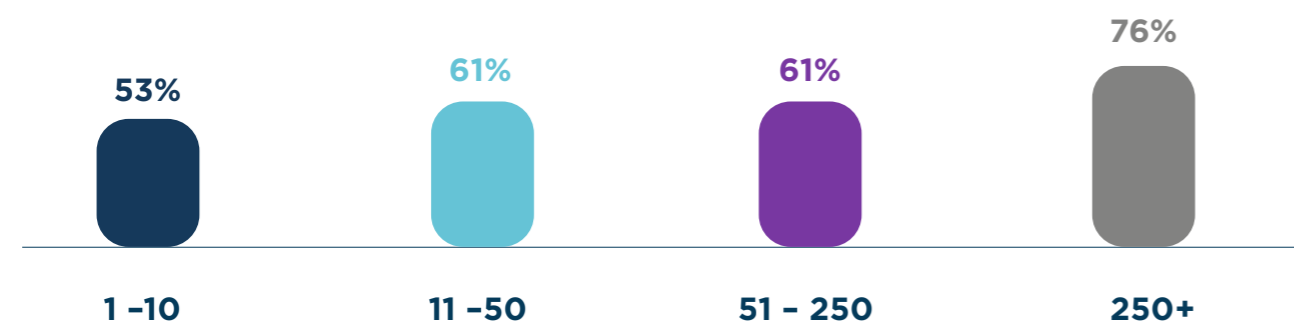
Since the water retail market opened in England in 2017, businesses, charities and public sector organisations have been free to shop around for the best deal for them - allowing them to either switch retailer or renegotiate their contract.

Chart 6: awareness of the water retail market in England by year



Business size

Chart 7: awareness of the water retail market in England by business size (number of employees) in 2024



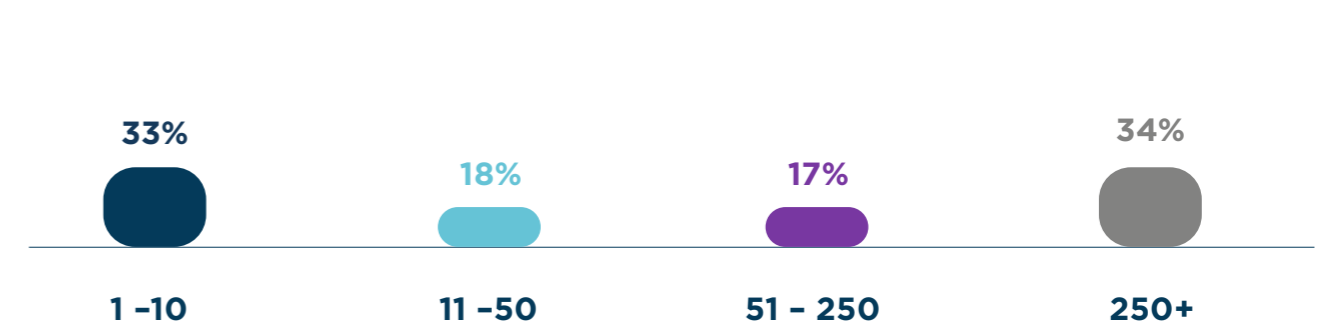
As in 2022, smaller businesses are the least likely to be aware of the water retail market in England, and larger businesses more likely.

As well as awareness remaining stable, the proportion of businesses who don't know or are unable to name their retailer also remains stable (25% in 2022).

24%

of businesses don't know/aren't able to name their retailer

Chart 8: % of businesses don't know/unaware of their water retailer 2024, by business size



Businesses with 10 or fewer employees and businesses with 250+ employees are less likely to be able to (correctly) recall their retailer than businesses with 11-50 or 51-250 employees.

Awareness of the water retail market in Wales

Currently in Wales, businesses which use more than 50 megalitres of water a year can switch their water retailer in the same way as businesses of all sizes in England.

The Welsh Government has engaged on future legislative changes which could mean that in future no businesses in Wales would be able to change their water retailer.

Business customers in Wales were asked whether they were aware of the existing arrangements, and then whether they were aware of the government's legislative change proposals. Of those aware, they were asked about their level of satisfaction with the proposals - of which 60% were satisfied (although this is based on a very low base size of 11).

12%

aware of the existing water retailer switching arrangements in Wales

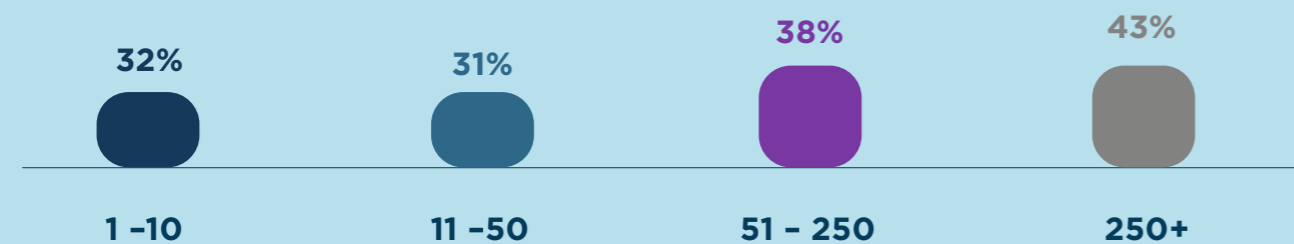
3%

aware of Welsh Government engagement on legislative changes which could mean no businesses in Wales being eligible to switch

Switching & renegotiating behaviour in England

Among those aware of the water retail market in 2024, 23% have switched their retailer (up from 19% in 2022), and 10% have renegotiated their contract (up from 8% in 2022).

Chart 9: % of businesses aware of the water retail market to have switched or renegotiated in 2024 by business size



Switched	Renegotiated	Proactive contact
<p>33% say they have since received better service, and 66% that they now get better value for money.</p> <p>12% offered a water efficiency service evaluation.</p>	<p>15% say they have since received better service, and 78% that they now get better value for money.</p> <p>14% offered a water efficiency service evaluation.</p>	<p>In 2024, just 8% of businesses say they have been proactively contacted by a retailer - with the smallest businesses (11%) more likely to have been contacted in this way than the largest businesses (6%).</p>



Caring for customers & trust

While levels of overall satisfaction with service have remained robust, business customers' perceptions of providers caring about customers have declined and levels of trust are low. However, the question scale for trust* has been updated so comparisons with previous years should be viewed as indicative and will be monitored closely in future rounds of Testing the Waters.

Among those who disagree their water service provider cares about the service it gives to customers, a fifth (20%) disagree due to pollution caused by sewage overflows etc. (up from 7% in 2022).

As in 2022, business customers in Wales are significantly more likely to agree that their water service provider cares (57%) than business customers in England (35%).

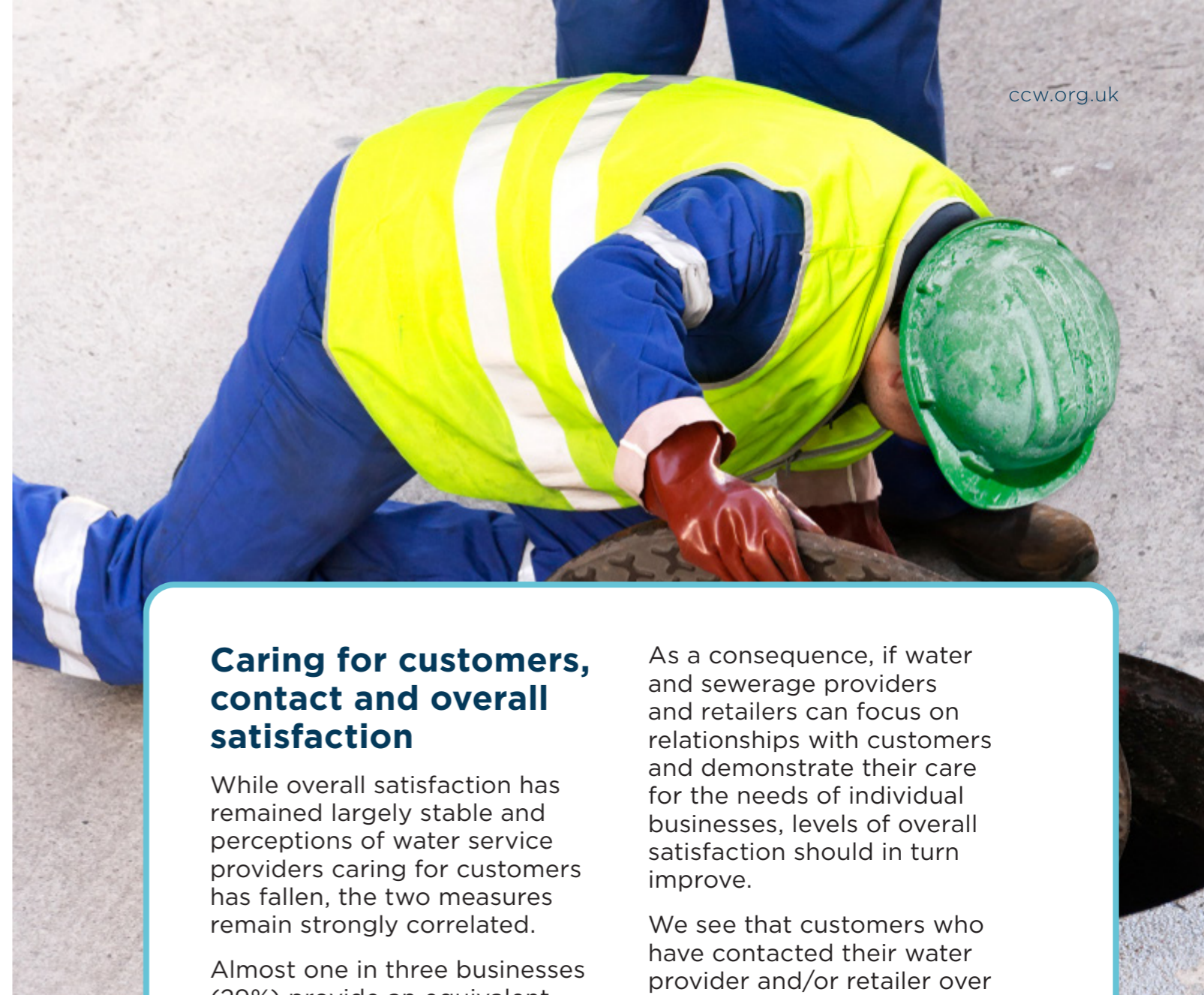
There is no significant difference by business size in agreement with the notion that their water service provider cares, or that they trust their water provider.

39%

agree their water service provider cares about the service it gives to customers (-7% cf. 2022)

49%

trust their water service provider



Caring for customers, contact and overall satisfaction

While overall satisfaction has remained largely stable and perceptions of water service providers caring for customers has fallen, the two measures remain strongly correlated.

Almost one in three businesses (29%) provide an equivalent answer to both the overall satisfaction and caring for customers questions (e.g. very satisfied and strongly agree their water provider cares about the service it provides to customers), and almost two thirds (64%) provide an answer within +/- 1 on the scale (e.g. very satisfied and slightly agree their water provider cares about the service it provides to customers).

As a consequence, if water and sewerage providers and retailers can focus on relationships with customers and demonstrate their care for the needs of individual businesses, levels of overall satisfaction should in turn improve.

We see that customers who have contacted their water provider and/or retailer over the past 12 months are more likely to be satisfied overall than those who have had no contact. Similarly, those who have switched water retailer or renegotiated a contract are also more likely to be satisfied overall than those who have taken no action. Despite this, just 8% of businesses aware of the water retail market recall having been proactively contacted by a retailer to switch.

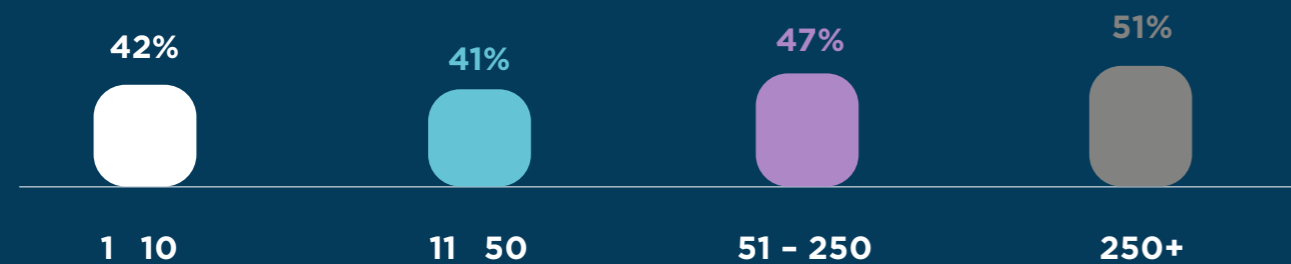
Increasing meaningful contact with customers will be key to ensuring robust levels of satisfaction in future.

*Note: trust scale changed from 10pt in 2022 to 5pt in 2024 - trust % in 2022 based on ratings of 8-10 (top three box), compared to ratings of 4-5 (top two box) in 2024. Treat with caution.

Water saving activity

Across all businesses, less than half are engaging in water saving activity (43% in 2024, compared to 39% in 2022).

Chart 10: % engaging in water saving activity by business size (number of employees)



Larger businesses are more likely to be engaging in water saving activity than smaller businesses.

In larger businesses there is also a greater likelihood of a lack of knowledge around any water saving activity that might be happening.

Almost one in five (17%) of those in businesses with 250+ employees say they don't know whether any water saving activity is happening, compared to just 2% in the smallest businesses (1-10 employees).

Water saving activity

There is no significant difference in the type of water saving action undertaken in 2024 compared to 2022, with the most common action being taken to make employees (more) aware of the need to reduce consumption (12%). Around 1 in 10 (9%) have water saving devices (e.g. Hippo/Save A Flush) installed – with a significantly higher percentage in businesses with 250+ employees (18%).

Water saving activity	2024	2022
Made employees aware of the need to reduce consumption	12%	8%
Hippo/Save A Flush device in toilet cisterns	9%	8%
Water efficient taps	6%	5%
Changed business processes to use less water	6%	3%
Rainwater harvesting	4%	4%
Being (more) conscious of how much water is used	3%	5%
Fixed leaks on the premises	3%	2%
Only put required amount in kettle	3%	4%
Energy/water efficient appliances	2%	3%
Asked for smart meters	2%	2%
Use water from other source (spring, bore hole, bottles etc.)	1%	2%
Monitoring water usage of taps/showers/toilets/urinals etc.	1%	1%
Undertaken water audits	1%	1%
Less staff on site/Working from home	1%	1%
Recycle water	1%	1%
Other	4%	2%
Nothing/don't know	57%	61%

Reasons for lack of water saving activity

While the proportion of businesses engaging in water saving measures has increased since 2022, the majority of businesses (57%) cannot identify any measures they have taken to reduce water usage across their business.

Among those who have taken no water saving action, two key themes emerge:

42% say there is nothing they can do to (further) reduce consumption at the business premises - rising to 56% among businesses with 1-10 employees

22% say their water bills are (relatively) low, so there is limited incentive to reduce consumption - however, no businesses with 250+ employees mention this

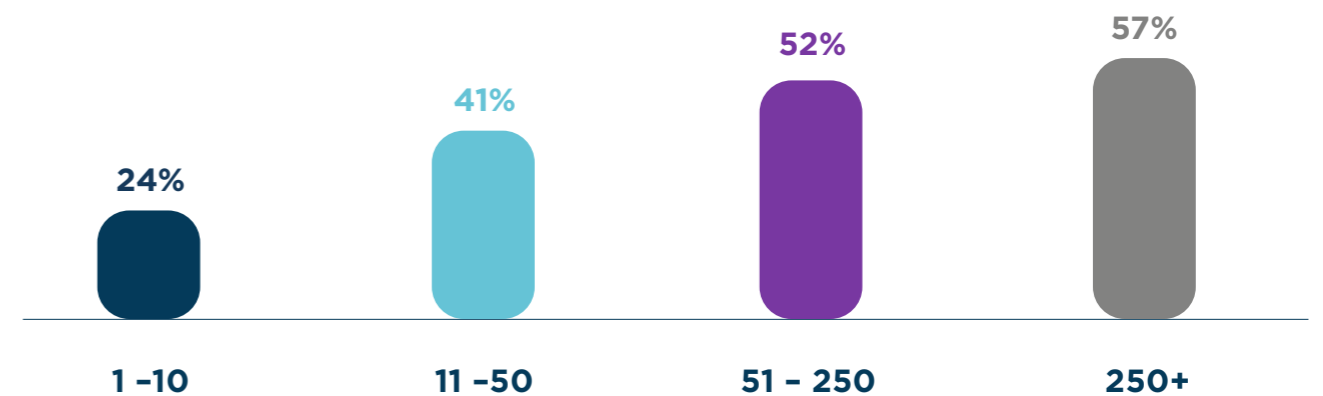
Those in larger businesses are also more likely to cite lack of time as a barrier to engaging in water saving activity (14% among businesses with 51-250 employees and 18% among businesses with 250+ employees).

Interest in water saving advice service

Just over a third a third (35%) of businesses would be interested in learning how to make water savings for their business if offered - with interest increasing in line with business size.

35% of businesses interested in a water saving advice service

Chart 11: interest in water saving advice service by business size, 2024



There is no difference in interest in a water saving advice service between businesses in England (35%) and Wales (34%). However, there are notable differences by sector, with those in public sector organisations (65%), transportation and storage (53%) and hospitality (48%) significantly more likely to be interested than other sectors.

Customer contact

The proportion of businesses that have contacted a supplier with an enquiry or complaint is broadly in line with 2022.

Overall

Contact volumes to retailers in 2024 are down slightly from 2020/21, with 21% contacting their retailer with an enquiry or complaint (compared to 24% in 2022).

Businesses in England are significantly more likely to have contacted their retailer with a complaint than businesses in Wales (8% vs. 2%), but there is no significant difference in enquiries (16% vs. 12%).

Although contacts should go through retailers, just under one in 10 businesses (9%) say they have contacted their water service supplier with an enquiry or complaint (compared to 11% in 2022), and 5% say they have contacted their sewerage service supplier (compared to 6% in 2022).

54%

who made an enquiry were satisfied with the outcome (53% in 2022)

36%

who complained were satisfied with the outcome (up from 25% in 2022)

Retail services: reasons for complaint (%)

Issue with bill	62%
Poor customer service	19% (up 10% vs. 2022)
Incorrect meter readings	17%

Retail services: reasons for enquiry (%)

General billing enquiry	68%
Issue with water meter	10%
Meter reading enquiry	10%

21% contacted their water retailer with an enquiry or complaint



Conclusions

Although overall satisfaction ratings have stabilised in 2024 after falling from 2020/21 to 2022, customers are now less likely to believe their water provider cares about the service it provides.

While there is no significant difference in overall satisfaction or wider perceptions between businesses of different sizes, it is evident that larger businesses act and engage with their water, retail and sewerage service providers in different ways to their smaller business counterparts.

Larger businesses are more likely to be engaging in water saving activity, and also have a higher degree of interest in water saving advice and support offerings.

Additionally, larger businesses are most likely to be aware of and engaged in the water retail market (in England), and to have taken some form of action in relation to either switching or renegotiating.

While smaller businesses are less engaged in the market overall, there are signs in 2024 that their engagement is increasing, with a significantly higher proportion either switching or renegotiating compared to 2022.

As has historically been the case, customers in Wales are more satisfied with the various aspects of their water, sewerage and retail services than customers in England – and in 2024 there is a 21% gap in overall satisfaction with retail services between customers in England and Wales.

Customers in Wales are also more likely to believe their water provider cares about the service it provides to customers.

The proportion of customers who have contacted their water retailer with an enquiry or complaint has remained stable between 2022 and 2024, as has satisfaction with the outcome of the contact(s).

Issues related to billing continue to be the main reason for businesses to make contact with a provider, and when they do make contact, the majority are satisfied with the outcome.

Next steps

Levels of satisfaction

We want to see satisfaction with retail services increase in England in order to reduce the gap with Wales. We will be working with retailers throughout the year to help address the main issues that are leading to customer dissatisfaction, including estimated billing. All retailers have the offer of taking part in a complaints assessment with CCW where we offer help and advice on complaints processes.

Awareness of the water retail market

In order for businesses to have the confidence to switch or renegotiate with their retailer and be active in the market, we are keen to see an increase in customer awareness and understanding of the water retail market in England. We will be working with key market stakeholders to help increase business customer knowledge and ensure there are appropriate protections in place for when they do switch retailer.

Water saving activity

Businesses want to know how they can save water and money. Through greater collaboration between wholesalers and retailers in the offering of water efficiency advice, and the roll-out of smart metering, we expect to see greater awareness of water use and how savings can be made across businesses of all sizes. It is important we all play our role to save water as we face increasing challenges from water scarcity. We will be encouraging that collaboration through our 'One Customer' forums.



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