

From: Billing, Customer <[Customer.Billing@niwater.com](mailto:Customer.Billing@niwater.com)>

Sent: 25 February 2022 11:40

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: C02120479 - High Consumption

Dear Mr Phillips

Customer Reference: C02120479

1 Downpatrick Street, Saintfield

Re: High Consumption

Thank you for your email on 19 February 2022 with attached Leakage Allowance Application form.

Unfortunately as you have stated that the leaked water returned to the public sewer, you would not be considered eligible for a Leakage Allowance on this occasion. While I appreciate this will not be the desired outcome, all NI Water customers are subject to the same policy with regard to Leakage Allowances.

I understand that this bill is significantly larger than what is normally issued. If you anticipate any difficulty in making payment, please call our Billing Line on 03458 770030 to discuss the long term repayment options available.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Customer Service Centre

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----- Original Message -----

From: [REDACTED]

To: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)

Cc: [REDACTED]

Sent: Sunday, 13 Mar, 22 At 22:03

Subject: C02120479 - High Consumption - Complaint

C02120479 - High Consumption - Complaint

I refer to the attached Leakage Allowance Application and your Customer Billings Team subsequent response below.

This matter has been referred by Andrew Phillips (Treasurer of Saintfield Masonic Hall) to the Trustees of the Hall.

As a direct result of Covid-19, Masonic meetings were suspended by our governing body in March 2020 and have only recently resumed, albeit with restrictions.

During the lockdown period, the hall caretaker made regular visits to the hall as required by our insurance company, however it wasn't until the 18/12/2021 that he identified that the toilet cistern was not working correctly, allowing water to run into the toilet bowl and personally took immediate action to resolve fixing the fault.

Saintfield Masonic Hall has been a customer of Northern Ireland Water for many years and reviewing our accounts you will find that our latest bill is totally out of line with other half yearly charges applied.

I have absolutely no doubt, that the delay in identifying this fault was a direct result meetings not being held in the hall owing to the restrictions imposed by local Northern Ireland government and the guidance which we then received and fully adhered to from our governing body.

The Masonic Order is a charitable institution and in addition we regularly allow other community groups within the Saintfield area to have the use of our hall for community outreach activities.

As a result of having substantially reduced income from our membership who were unable to meet in the hall during the Covid-19 pandemic and now having to meet a totally unexpected water charge (c£1,800 for the half year) this is putting "extraordinary pressure" on Saintfield Masonic Hall being able to meet our financial commitments.

Saintfield Masonic Hall has previously (and will continue) to met all charges from Northern Ireland Water, however as a gesture of goodwill we would really appreciate if

you would reconsider as a one off request allowing us to avail of a Leakage Allowance, reducing our bill to an average of our half years bills pre Covid-19 please?

Thanking you in anticipation  
Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]  
Trustee of Saintfield Masonic Hall

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From: "Billing, Customer" <[Customer.Billing@niwater.com](mailto:Customer.Billing@niwater.com)>

To: "[REDACTED]"

Sent: Monday, 28 Mar, 22 At 10:52

Subject: Customer Reference: C02120479 1 Downpatrick, Saintfield Re: Leak Allowance

Dear [REDACTED]

Customer Reference: C02120479  
1 Downpatrick, Saintfield

Re: Leak Allowance

Thank you for your emails on 13 & 22 March 2022 in relation to the above matter and apologies for the delay in getting back you.

I appreciate that our decision in relation to you Leak Allowance was not the outcome you were hoping for and I am sorry for any disappointment this has caused. However, our policy in relation to leakage must be consistent for all of our customers. NI Water cannot make an exception in this case, as this would be unfair to our other customers who have not been granted allowances under similar circumstances.

As per our scheme of charges, all water consumption recorded by a water meter will be charges for, including that which is lost to leakage. Furthermore, as the leaked water returned to the sewer for treatment by NI Water, a leak allowance is not applicable to the excess sewerage charges.

Private pipe-work and infrastructure is of the customer's responsibility to maintain and repair. As the leakage did not occur on NI Water pipework, we are unable to assume any responsibility for the increase in consumption.

Going forward, we would recommend that you take regular meter readings at this supply in order to increase your chances of detecting leakage early.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]  
Customer Service Centre

**From:**

[REDACTED]

**Sent:** 07 June 2022 11:31

**To:**

[REDACTED]

>

**Subject:** RE: Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall, 1 Downpatrick, Saintfield Re: Leak Allowance / Complaint

Hi [REDACTED]

I hope you are keeping well.

I can go back to Northern Ireland Water and ask for a repayment plan however we would be unable to get a leakage allowance applied because of the source of the leak allowed it to go into the public sewer.

The best option for the Masonic may be to contact their insurance provider to help towards the costs.

Please let me know if you would like to me to contact Northern Ireland Water regarding this.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]

**Sent:** 08 June 2022 13:09

**To:**

[REDACTED]

>

**Subject:** FW: Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall, 1 Downpatrick, Saintfield Re: Leak Allowance / Complaint

Good afternoon [REDACTED]

As directed by the constituent, would you please proceed with NI Water.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

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**From:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Sent:** 08 June 2022 12:47

**To:**

[REDACTED]

>

**Subject:** RE: Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall, 1 Downpatrick, Saintfield Re: Leak Allowance / Complaint

Thank you [REDACTED].

I would very much appreciate if you could have the Consumer Council pursue NI Water on this matter please, as this is the 1st time (and I trust only time) we have such an issue.

As highlighted previously, I have absolutely no doubt, that the delay in identifying this fault was a direct result of meetings not being held in the hall owing to the restrictions imposed by local Northern Ireland government and the guidance which we then received and fully adhered to from our governing body.

I continue to believe NI Water's approach is unreasonable given what was happening as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic, can I suggest that

[REDACTED] (or maybe [REDACTED]) also raises this directly with [REDACTED], Chief Executive NI Water and the Minister for Infrastructure please?

Thank you.

DW. (07811009876)

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**From:**

[REDACTED]

>

**Sent:** 08 June 2022 13:09

**To:**

[REDACTED]

>

**Subject:** FW: Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall, 1 Downpatrick, Saintfield Re: Leak Allowance / Complaint

Good afternoon [REDACTED];

As directed by the constituent, would you please proceed with NI Water.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

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Fri 24/06/2022 18:39

Good evening [REDACTED],

NI Water have responded to advise that the bill has been paid in full, so there will be no need for a repayment plan.

As expected, they will not offer a goodwill gesture, or a leakage allowance, as the water which went to the public sewer had to be treated meaning there was a cost associated with this.

I apologise we were unable to provide a more satisfactory outcome on this occasion.

Kind regards

---

Wed 27/07/2022 10:07

DoF Private Office [REDACTED]

Minister;

I draw your attention to this ongoing matter.

There has been no satisfactory resolution to this issue via NI Water and I am raising this with you for the second time to address this overcharge given the circumstances at the time when people were observing the covid-19 regulations as required by law.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

---

Wed 27/07/2022 14:13

Raised By: [REDACTED]

Reference: COR-2095-2022

Subject: DTR : Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall, 1 Downpatrick, Saintfield Leak Allowance / Complaint (Case Ref: JS13594)

Referred To: DFI PRIVATE OFFICE

Date Referred: 27/07/2022

The attached correspondence appears to fall within the responsibility of your Department.

Are you content to accept the transfer?

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
Minister's Private Office  
[REDACTED]

---

From: Dfl Private Office  
Sent: 27 July 2022 15:08

Raised By: [REDACTED]  
Reference: COR-2202-2022

Subject: COR-2202-2022 : Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall-  
leak allowance/complaint  
Referred To: [REDACTED]  
Date referred: 27/07/2022

#### ACTION REQUIRED

This case has been allocated to your business area as the lead. If you feel that the lead in this case rests more appropriately with another business area you should agree the transfer with that business area immediately and inform the Private Office accordingly via the mailbox at [REDACTED]

Please provide advice and a draft reply for signature by the Minister

To be with [REDACTED] not later than 03/08/2022

Please ensure all information relating to this case is stored in folder IN1-22- 11379

Please find attached new correspondence template to be completed going forward. Please note that the response letter for Minister and Private Secretary response is included in this template- please delete as applicable.

For any part inputs please continue to use the Part Input template on the intranet.

Should you feel that part input is required in this case, you should arrange this directly with the relevant business area(s) with a suitable deadline for response to ensure that you are able to forward the finalised response to the Private Office in line with the case deadline above.

Should you feel that part input is required from another Department please contact Private Office immediately who will arrange to commission the required input.

In addition, if you consider another business area(s) would benefit from seeing this case, please forward to them for their information.

For further information etc. contact:

[REDACTED]  
Dfl Private Office  
[REDACTED]

Wed 27/07/2022 16:07

DoF Private Office [REDACTED]

Hello [REDACTED]

This is one that I am familiar with from before. Just checking that nothing has changed from our previous conversations on this one before I reply.

I note that this has been paid.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

---

Wed 27/07/2022 17:50

DLO [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

New one on me. Nothing has changed. This would be operational but suggest you reply that as previously advised to customer and CCNI no allowance is payable.

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Web: [www.niwater.com](http://www.niwater.com)



**From:** [REDACTED]  
Water & Drainage Policy Division

**Your Ref:**

**Our Ref:** COR/2202/2022

**Tel:** 028 903 42922

**Date:** 01 August 2022

**To:** 1. [REDACTED]  
AC 3/8/22

**cc:** Copy distribution below

2. John O'Dowd MLA  
Minister for Infrastructure

**COR-2202/2022 – [REDACTED]: Saintfield Masonic Hall –Leak Allowance/Complaint**

**Issue:** This is an ongoing dispute with NI Water regarding a water meter bill following a water leakage at the Saintfield Masonic Hall premises.

**Timescale:** **ROUTINE** (clearance required within 5 working days)

**Presentational Issues:** May attract local media interest and Press Office will liaise with officials if any queries should arise. JW 03 08 22

**FOI Implications** • This contents of this case is likely to be fully disclosable;

**Financial Implications:** There are no financial implications for the Department. KM 3/8/22

**Legislative Implications:** N/A

**Section 75 Implications:** N/A

**Executive Referral:** Executive referral is not required.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the you:

- Note the contents of this submission; and
- Clear the draft letter to issue.

## BACKGROUND

- [REDACTED] in Strangford has written to you, for the second time since June 2022, on behalf of the committee at Saintfield Masonic Hall in relation to an £1800 water charge bill that occurred during lockdown due to a faulty toilet cistern.

- He has stated that as this situation is a direct consequence of compliance with Covid restrictions, he is of the view that the Masonic hall is being wrongly penalised for adhering to the regulations, otherwise the leak would have been identified at an earlier stage.
- On 9/06/2022 a response was issued to Mr. Shannon outlining that this was an operational matter for NI Water.
- NI Water and the Consumer Council have already investigated and responded on this matter. NI Water has stated that as per their scheme of charges, all water consumption recorded by a water meter will be charged for, including that which is lost to leakage.
- This leakage was not applicable for a leak allowance as the leaked water returned to the sewer for treatment by NI Water. Private pipe-work and infrastructure is the customer's responsibility to maintain and repair. As the leakage did not occur on NI Water pipework, they were unable to assume any responsibility for the increase in consumption.
- This bill has now been paid in full.

**Drafted by:** [REDACTED] 01/08/2022 and  
Ext No.42922

**Cleared by Head of Division:** [REDACTED] 03/08/2022 and  
Ext No.86200

**Cleared by Special Adviser:** Please leave blank.

**Copy to:**

[REDACTED]

PS To the Above

**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure  
John O'Dowd MLA**

Room 708  
Clarence Court  
10-18 Adelaide Street

Email

BT2 8GB  
Telephone (028) 9054 0540  
e:  
Email:

Your reference: C02120479  
Our reference: COR/2202/2022  
[Date]

Jim, a chara,

**Saintfield Masonic Hall –Leak Allowance/Complaint**

Thank you for your email of the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022 in relation to an ongoing dispute with NI Water regarding a water meter bill.

I understand that both NI Water and the Consumer Council have already responded to you on this matter. I fully appreciate your concerns, however this is an operational matter for NI Water and as such they must ensure all customers are billed fairly and equitably.

Regrettably there is no further action that the Department can take at this time.

Is mise le meas,

**JOHN O'DOWD MLA  
Minister for Infrastructure**

-----Original Message-----

From: Dfl Water Correspondence [REDACTED]  
Sent: 02 August 2022 10:31  
To: [REDACTED]  
Subject: : \*For Clearance\*: COR-2202-2022 : Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall- leak allowance/complaint

Good Morning [REDACTED]  
For consideration I enclose draft completed for COR 2022. This is a new template format. This is due on the 3rd August 2022.

Thanks  
[REDACTED]

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-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]  
Sent: 02 August 2022 16:51  
To: Dfl Water Correspondence <[REDACTED]>  
Cc: [REDACTED]  
Subject: FW: : \*For Clearance\*: COR-2202-2022 : Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall- leak allowance/complaint

[REDACTED]

I've completed the front page of this new template in tracked changes in CM - you will need to get press office and finance to clear and initial their sections otherwise Private Office will send it back.

-----Original Message-----

From: Dfl Water Correspondence  
Sent: 03 August 2022 09:00  
To: [REDACTED] Dfl Press Office [REDACTED]  
Cc: Dfl Water Correspondence [REDACTED]  
Subject: FW: : \*For Clearance\*: COR-2202-2022 : Customer Reference: C02120479 Saintfield Masonic Hall- leak allowance/complaint

Good Morning  
Please see enclosed draft response to COR 2202 which [REDACTED] has cleared. Can you clear and initial your relevant section so that I can issue to Private Office. This is due COP today.

Many Thanks  
[REDACTED]

Wed 03/08/2022 09:18

[REDACTED]

I have cleared from a Finance perspective - initials added to the CM version.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]  
Financial Planning and Management Branch

Tel: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

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Wed 03/08/2022 09:34

[REDACTED]

I have amended the PIs as there is a chance [REDACTED] may go to media.

[REDACTED]

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-----Original Message-----

From: Dfl Water Correspondence [REDACTED]

Sent: 03 August 2022 10:08

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Dfl Water Correspondence [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: : \*For Clearance\*: COR-2202-2022 : Customer Reference: C02120479  
Saintfield Masonic Hall- leak allowance/complaint

[REDACTED]

I have sought and received clearance from Press Office and Guidance on this draft response. Just to clarify the process going forward-Does

[REDACTED] to clear this correspondence?

Thanks

[REDACTED]

---

Wed 03/08/2022 10:37

[REDACTED]

Great thanks.

No Gd 3 clearance needed - everything is cleared at GD 5 level now unless something exceptional needs GD 3 clearance.

I have to initial and sign all CORs and INVs off in the To box at the top of the sub - which I've done in the CM version for this one- I've also amended the copy list a little.

It's good to go.

[REDACTED]

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Wed 03/08/2022 10:48  
Good Morning

Please see enclosed draft response to COR 2202 . This has been cleared by which

[REDACTED].

Many Thanks

[REDACTED]