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## Vanilla Hairdressing, West Midlands

Paul Ward has been cutting and styling hair for the people of Dudley in the West Midlands from the same premises for 25 years.

Working alongside a team of four staff, business is brisk but can be irregular, with anything from ten to 20 customers every day looking for services from a cut and blow-dry to a whole new look.

With such a varied customer base, Paul's water needs change from day to day for hand washing, flushing toilets, cleaning towels – not to mention washing customers' hair.

Paul switched to having a water meter ten years ago to keep a closer track of his bills, rather than pay a flat rate based on his property's rateable value. Paul estimates that the business pays £170 every six months.

The company is currently supplied by South Staffs Water, which generates a single bill that includes the cost of wastewater services provided by Severn Trent. Paul heard about the opening up of the water market in April from a family member.

Paul says: "At the moment I think water's a bit of a different situation to other utilities like gas and electricity, where they offer to mend your boiler and provide advice on how much energy you use. With water, their responsibility seems to stop once the pipe reaches the edge of your property, other than if you have a burst main in the street and you get flooded out.

There should be more to customer service than supplying the water to your door, like advice on how to use water more efficiently which, for businesses like mine, would be really helpful."

"I haven't given switching much thought as yet, but I think competition could be a good thing if customer service were to improve, so people feel they're getting a bit more value for their bill than just what comes out of the tap."



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To find out more about Open Water and to see if your business is eligible to choose who supplies its water and wastewater services, visit [www.open-water.org.uk](http://www.open-water.org.uk)