

SPSO decision report

Case: 201103006, Scottish Water
Sector: water
Subject: policy / administration
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C planned to build an extension to his property. A water main runs through his garden, close to the area into which he intended to extend. Scottish Water require mains pipes to be located at least five metres away from properties. As this was not possible in Mr C's case, they required him to divert the pipe and replace it with one made of ductile iron. Mr C had originally been quoted a total of £500 by his builder to move the pipe, but with reconnection charges and the requirement for different materials, the total cost escalated to the point that Mr C decided not to proceed with his extension.

Mr C complained that, when corresponding with Scottish Water, he learned that ductile iron pipes are not normally used in his area. He noted that the existing water main was located within five metres of his property and was made of plastic. Furthermore, Scottish Water had commented that they 'cannot stress enough that there is no reason to suggest that this main would be in danger from bursting'. Mr C complained that Scottish Water treated him unfairly by asking him to bear the cost of relocating and upgrading the water main when there was no apparent need to do so.

We considered it appropriate for Scottish Water to require that the water main was diverted from its current location and for Mr C to meet the associated charges, as the diversion was required because of his proposed extension. The initial amount quoted by Mr C's builder did not include Scottish Water's standard charges so we did not hold Scottish Water responsible for this. We found that alternative, potentially cheaper, materials could have been used rather than ductile iron. Whilst this material was initially proposed by Mr C's architect, we found that correspondence from Scottish Water also gave the impression that ductile iron was the only acceptable material.

We found clear evidence that Mr C's decision to stop the extension works resulted from news of a further £1,000 charge from Scottish Water, intended to cover operational costs. Once this charge was identified, Scottish Water's staff correctly asked for authorisation from their Customer Connections team who quickly decided not to pass the charge on to Mr C. However, contrary to their written procedures, Scottish Water's staff advised Mr C of the charge before the Customer Connections team had made their decision. This led to Mr C cancelling his extension works.

Recommendations

We recommended that Scottish Water:

- apologise to Mr C for the issues highlighted in this decision letter; and
- waive all reconnection and operational charges should Mr C decide to proceed with his extension in the future.