

SPSO decision report

Case: 201104215, Business Stream Ltd
Sector: Scottish Government and devolved administration
Subject: incorrect billing
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained on behalf of a company that Business Stream incorrectly calculated their water charges between December 2009 and April 2012. She said that while she was in dispute with Business Stream about the matter, the company was pursued by debt collectors, although she had been told that the account was on hold.

We looked at the correspondence, statements of account and invoices, and printouts from Business Stream's billing system. Our investigation found that when Business Stream issued the company with an invoice in February 2011, they did so on the basis of information provided to them by Scottish Water. In March 2011, Business Stream learned that this information was wrong, and so were the bills they had issued. However, it took until September 2011 for the company's accounts to be closed and for a new bill to be issued. Business Stream were unable to provide us with any reasons for this. We found this to be maladministration and upheld the complaint.

Business Stream also provided dates of when the company's account was on hold but we found that a demand for payment was sent to them during this time. This should not have happened because Mrs C had been told the account would be suspended until the matter was resolved.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- apologise for the delay in regularising the situation with regard to the meter, Mrs C's water bills and address. The apology should also take into account the fact that a demand for payment was made when Mrs C's account was on hold, and should be enhanced by a payment of £200 in recognition of the inconvenience suffered as a consequence of Business Stream's actions;
- satisfy themselves that there is a process to ensure that holds on accounts are notified to companies seeking payment on their behalf; and
- advise staff concerned of the necessity of keeping correct records, particularly as failure to do so can lead to incorrect invoices.