

SPSO decision report

Case: 201105283, Business Stream Ltd
Sector: Scottish Government and devolved administration
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained that Business Stream delayed in issuing her bill after Scottish Water told them that her business premises were receiving water and waste water services, for which she had not been charged. When Scottish Water identify a property like this, they notify a licensed provider such as Business Stream, who then start billing from the date they were notified. In Ms C's case, however, Business Stream took seven months to issue a bill. The bill was based on the rateable value of the property, as Ms C did not have a water meter installed at that time. During our investigation of the complaint, Business Stream told us that when they receive details of properties that are not being charged for water, they need to open a property account, discover if there is someone in the property and then confirm their details in order to begin charging. However, in Ms C's case, there was no evidence that they had taken any significant action until they issued the bill to her. This was seven months after they received the information from Scottish Water.

Ms C then applied for a water meter and her charges were reassessed from the date it was installed. However, this was four months after Business Stream sent out her bill and eleven months after Scottish Water contacted them about Ms C's premises. Ms C complained that Business Stream did not tell her how she could request a meter or apply to have her charges reassessed. Business Stream said that there were no notes on their computer system of any conversation with Ms C about reassessment, but there was information on their website about how to apply. We considered that Business Stream should send out information about reassessment when they initially contact customers who do not have a meter installed.

Ms C had benefited from free water and waste water services for six months before Scottish Water contacted Business Stream. We considered that she had some responsibility to ensure that she was paying for these services. During our investigation, Business Stream agreed to backdate Ms C's metered charges for a short period, because they had not responded to correspondence. However, in view of the fact that we upheld her complaints that Business Stream delayed in setting up her account and failed to provide her with adequate information about reassessment, we asked them to reconsider their decision about the date to which the metered charges should be backdated, taking all of the above information into account.

Ms C also complained that Business Stream had failed to respond to some of her emails. However, we did not find any evidence of this.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- issue a written apology for the failure to provide Ms C with adequate information about reassessment when they initially contacted her;
- consider how they can ensure that they provide adequate information about reassessment to new customers who do not have a meter installed;
- reconsider their decision regarding what date metered charges should be backdated to in Ms C's case;

and

- issue a written apology to Ms C for the delay in issuing the initial bill.