

SPSO decision report

Case: 201200564, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: meter reading
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained that Business Stream had treated her unreasonably, in that she had been sent a bill for her property that was far too high.

Our investigation found that Ms C's treatment had been unreasonable. The high bill could have been caused by a number of factors other than the reason given and these had not been fully investigated. In particular we found that the failure to test a water meter that was acknowledged to be faulty had deprived Ms C of a legitimate opportunity to challenge the bill. Given the size of the sum disputed and its implications for Ms C's business, we took the view that it was unreasonable for Business Stream not to have carried out further investigation. We also found that Ms C's complaint was poorly handled and subject to unnecessary delay and that there had been poor internal communication between the different departments at Business Stream.

We found that it was reasonable for Scottish Water to carry out a dye test without giving advance warning of their attendance.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- provide evidence to the Ombudsman that staff in customer facing roles have been appropriately advised about Scottish Water's policies regarding visits;
- review their charges with a view to charging for water consumption estimated on previous and current usage for the period in question;
- apologise in writing for the inconvenience and distress caused by their failure to handle the complaint in a timely fashion; and
- provide evidence to the Ombudsman that they have reviewed inter-departmental communication to ensure that the customer relations and collections departments share information in a timely manner so that disputed invoices are not pursued until the complaint has been resolved.