

SPSO decision report

Case: 201200638, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that Business Stream failed to repair a faulty meter that was installed in his property in 2010 and that, when he told them in February 2011 that he had had to remove it because it had failed in bad weather, they did not replace it until March 2012. Mr C said when Scottish Water (who retain some responsibility for meters even when a customer of Business Stream) picked up the meter he had been told they could not be bothered installing a new one. In March 2012 Mr C was told that his bills from 2011 to 2012 would be recalculated. He was unhappy that this meant that from March 2011 to March 2012 he was being billed on an unmeasured basis, costing him much more than if he had been on a meter. The bills had previously been worked out on an estimated basis. Mr C also said that he had applied for e-billing but had problems accessing his account.

We were not able to uphold Mr C's claim that Scottish Water had said at a meeting that they would replace the meter in June 2010. As there was a zero reading when it was removed in March 2011, Mr C had not paid for any water usage, and had only paid standard charges, from June 2010 until the meter was removed. Mr C was also not charged for the installation of the new meter. Business Stream were charged but did not pass this cost on.

In March 2011, Scottish Water told Business Stream that Mr C had not let them install a meter. Business Stream emailed Mr C to tell him this and that he would be billed on an unmeasured basis. Mr C did not receive this email. We also found that Mr C tried to sign up for e-billing in April 2011, but this was not activated until July 2011. Despite this, he did not receive a bill that should have been sent to him by post in May 2011, given e-billing was not yet available to him.

Our investigation found that within two days of physically removing the meter Scottish Water should have updated a central database with the information that it had been removed. They did not do so for twelve months, which meant that all Mr C's bills for that period were calculated on the wrong basis. There is a responsibility on customers to ensure they are paying properly for the services they receive. However, this was not a case where Mr C had failed to provide information. Both Business Stream and Scottish Water were aware that the information was wrong and that Mr C was being billed on the wrong basis for twelve months. Mr C had moved very quickly to have a meter installed in 2012, when he became aware of this. We, therefore, took the view that, if he had received bills on the basis that he did not have a meter, it was likely he would have acted quickly to resolve this. While this is only a likely possibility rather than a certainty, a twelve-month failure to ensure that the bills were accurate prevented Mr C from acting to reduce them. On this basis, we upheld his complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- recalculate the bill for the period March 2011 until the meter was installed, based on an estimate of water usage using recent readings;
- apologise to Mr C for the failing identified; and
- share our decision letter with Scottish Water.

