

SPSO decision report

Case: 201201438, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C ran a bar and was aware that his water consumption was higher than other bars in the area. He said that he contacted Scottish Water and/or Business Stream to complain, but their engineers told him that there was no problem. He then decided to fit water saving taps. When the plumber switched off the water supply to complete the job, this also switched off the water supply to the flats above the bar. Mr C then realised that the water for the flats was being metered through the bar's supply. He contacted Business Stream, who told him to get the supply split as quickly as possible, as he was liable for the bills. They also said that he was unlikely to get a refund. Mr C had to employ two local plumbers to isolate the flats from his meter, and told us that Business Stream suggested that he sue his neighbours or the local council to get back the extra charges he had paid.

Mr C complained that Business Stream failed to recognise earlier that his meter also served the flats. However, our investigation found that Scottish Water is only responsible for the water main in a street and the communication pipe up to and including the stopcock at the boundary of a property. Property owners are responsible for the supply pipe from the stopcock into the property and all of the indoor plumbing. In addition, there was no evidence that Mr C contacted Business Stream or Scottish Water about his water consumption before he found that the water for the flats was being metered through the bar's supply.

Mr C was also unhappy that Business Stream did not compensate him. He felt that they should have done so as the flats paid water charges with their council tax and he also paid these through his meter. We found that where a metered supply includes domestic properties, these properties should not pay separately for water services. Business Stream instead charges their business customer, in this case Mr C, for the metered usage. Mr C's neighbours should, therefore, have had a private arrangement with him to pay for their consumption. We noted that Business Stream's policy says that they cannot become involved in such disputes. However, we found that they should have provided Mr C with further advice about how he could pursue this with his neighbours and, although we did not uphold the complaint, we made recommendations to address this.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- provide Mr C with further advice on recouping charges from the domestic properties; and
- take steps to ensure that customers in similar situations are provided with adequate advice about recouping charges from domestic properties.