

SPSO decision report

Case: 201201916, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: some upheld, action taken by body to remedy, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C is the factor of an estate. He said that his predecessor had agreed with Scottish Water in 2007 to disconnect water to a farm trough, and that after this, Scottish Water would check the work and stop charging. Mr C understood that the water had been disconnected. However, the estate continued to receive water bills and in 2012 Mr C pursued this with Business Stream. He made an application for disconnection which he was told would cost £300. He was later told that this was just an application fee/deposit and that the actual work would cost in the region of £3,400. Mr C complained to us that the disconnection costs were totally disproportionate to the work required as he understood that his predecessor had disconnected the supply. He also complained that he was given misleading information about the £300 fee.

As part of our investigation we made enquiries of Business Stream. Business Stream then asked Scottish Water to check the status of the trough and they confirmed that it was not disconnected. We did not find the cost quoted by Business Stream to be disproportionate, as it was a standard charge that had been fairly and reasonably applied, so we did not uphold this complaint. However, it appeared that Mr C was given incorrect information about the £300 fee. He had understood it to be a disconnection charge, and the documentation we read confirmed this. In reality, however, it was only an application fee or deposit. We upheld this complaint and, in the circumstances, Business Stream offered to make Mr C an ex gratia (voluntary) payment of £300. Scottish Water also agreed to waive the costs of disconnecting the trough if the estate themselves carried out the work satisfactorily (ie in accordance with the terms offered and in place in 2007). In the circumstances we did not find it necessary to make any recommendations.