

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203030, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: communication / consultation
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C's business was identified as occupying premises that were receiving water services without being charged (known in the water industry as a gap site). As the default licensed provider for commercial water services, Mr C's business's details were passed to Business Stream who created an account in July 2012 and backdated their charges to the date Mr C's business moved into the premises. Mr C complained that Business Stream issued his company with bills and aggressive reminders without any introduction or information about who they are. He also complained that he was not given any option other than to use Business Stream.

We accepted Business Stream's position that Mr C's business had occupied the premises since June 2011 and had used water, waste water and drainage services without charge. As such, we considered it appropriate for Business Stream to recover the amounts due for the period between June 2011 and July 2012. Businesses are required to arrange their water services through a licensed provider and Business Stream are the default provider for customers who have not chosen an alternative. We considered it appropriate for Mr C to be contacted by Business Stream and advised of the water charges that had accrued against his property. However, we were concerned by the nature of that contact. We did not consider it reasonable for the first contact to have been a bill for a substantial sum with no explanation enclosed. Furthermore, the market code, which all water companies are required to follow, required that Mr C be given an initial period to choose his preferred licensed provider. He was denied this opportunity.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- apologise to Mr C for the failure by them, and Scottish Water, to contact him with a proper explanation as to the need to pay water charges and the process of selecting a licensed provider.