

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203319, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: meter reading
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained on behalf of an association that in October 2011, without warning, they received a water bill for over £19,000. He complained to Business Stream that, given the association's past history, the bill must be incorrect. Further bills followed despite Mr C's contention that the bill was incorrect but that it was not until five months later that he was told that his account had been reassessed and recalculated. While Mr C wrote and said that he wanted a more detailed explanation, he heard nothing more until July 2012 and this merely enclosed a copy of the March 2012 letter. Mr C continued to complain but a detailed reply was not sent until August 2012. Mr C was aggrieved that Business Stream had not read the association's water meter correctly between August 2008 and October 2011. He further complained that they did not adequately investigate the disputed high consumption since the association's meter was installed in August 2008.

Our investigation took the complaints correspondence, statements of account and invoices, and Business Stream's internal computerised records into account. We also made further enquiries of Business Stream. The investigation confirmed that there had been difficulty in finding the meter and that it had not been read until January 2011. It was read again in October 2011 and confirmed to be correct. A 'high consumption' letter was sent to Mr C on the day that the bill was issued. As a consequence of Mr C's insistence that his bill was incorrect, Business Stream established that the opening figure for his account was incorrect and they reassessed his bill accordingly. As there had been a problem with the initial meter reading, we upheld this complaint.

By January 2012, Business Stream had confirmed the problem with the reading and they started to implement required changes a few days later. What they did not do was to explain this clearly, in a timely manner. They did not tell Mr C this until March 2012 nor did they explain the situation clearly. They then failed to address his further letters properly until August 2012. Although we did not uphold this complaint, we made a recommendation to address this.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- formally apologise to Mr C for their error;
- reduce Mr C's bill by a further five percent; and
- apologise to Mr C for the way in which they handled his continued representations.