

SPSO decision report

Case: 201204210, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: leakage
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C's business experienced a significant increase in water consumption in December 2011. However, it was not until a further bill arrived in May 2012 that he became aware of an underground leak on the pipework. Mr C noted that Business Stream state on their website that they will notify customers when they identify abnormally high water usage at properties. He complained that Business Stream failed to live up to that commitment, causing his business to incur unnecessarily high bills. Mr C also complained about Business Stream's communication when dealing with his concerns.

Our investigation found that Business Stream's policy is to notify customers if they identify an increase of more than two and a half times the normal level of water usage. We were satisfied that Mr C's water meter was read twice per year in line with normal practice and that, while his water usage increased before May 2012, the increase was less than the two and a half times threshold. As such, we would not have expected Business Stream to contact him before the May 2012 meter reading. After this reading, Business Stream took immediate action to check that it was correct and to phone Mr C. In line with their procedure, when he could not be contacted, they wrote to him to advise him of the high water consumption. We were generally satisfied that Business Stream took reasonable steps to identify the leak and bring it to Mr C's attention.

We found that Business Stream had followed the relevant policy or procedure with regard to each of Mr C's concerns. However, in every case we found their communication with him to be poor. We also found that a policy referred to by their staff was misleading and had likely added to the confusion when explaining Business Stream's position.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- apologise to Mr C for the confusion caused when dealing with his enquiries; and
- consider clarifying the wording of their Burst Allowance Policy to make consistent reference to the 'supply boundary' throughout.