

SPSO decision report

Case: 201205404, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: incorrect billing
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C's company occupied two sites, one of which contained two buildings - a factory and separate offices. The bills for both sites were issued to the factory site address. The factory itself had been derelict since 2006 and was demolished in 2011. When it was demolished, Mr C paid Scottish Water to install a new supply point and a new water meter for the offices there. In November 2011, however, he received a separate bill for water usage at the site, backdated five years. Mr C complained to Business Stream that he had been incorrectly billed. He said the bill was inaccurate and showed a level of water usage that was far too high. He said that he had always paid bills promptly and that the company had not noticed they were only receiving bills for one site, instead of two. He also complained that Business Stream failed to deal with his complaint appropriately, as he repeatedly had to phone them to chase the complaint and Business Stream had taken many months to respond. He said that when Business Stream did issue the final response it was incorrect and they had to issue a revised bill. This had taken a further four months and Business Stream had not apologised for this.

Our investigation found that the bill issued to Mr C was supported by meter readings. It was also lower than an estimated bill from the last full year of billing in 2006. Business Stream explained that they had been unaware of the site as the account had been closed in error in 2006 when the factory was abandoned. As, however, the water meter also served the offices on the site, which had remained in use, the account should not have been closed. This had happened before Business Stream existed, and they were not responsible for that initial mistake. We did not uphold this complaint, as we concluded that the amount was not excessive and that Business Stream were entitled to issue a bill for the water usage on the site.

We did, however, find that Business Stream had failed to deal with the complaint appropriately. Mr C had disputed the invoice as soon as he received it and had repeatedly phoned to chase this up, but had not received a written response for nine months. Business Stream had taken over a year to send their final response, which was then inaccurate. We found that Business Stream had not established the facts around the case before trying to close it and had failed to treat the matter as a complaint, prolonging the case unnecessarily.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- apologise for the failings identified in our investigation; and
- credit Mr C's account with a payment of ten percent of the outstanding bill in recognition of the time and trouble caused to him in pursuing this matter.