

SPSO decision report

Case: 201300160, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained to us about the level of Business Stream's invoices. He thought his initial invoice – which had been based on a water meter - was too high and claimed that Business Stream had told him that he would be better off moving to unmetered billing. Four water meters were removed from Mr C's premises and an unmetered invoice was applied in place of the original invoice. Although the unmetered invoice was slightly cheaper, Mr C felt that it was still too high. When he complained, he was advised that he might wish to apply for reassessment. This is a process where Business Stream's customers can check whether or not they would be cheaper moving from unmetered to metered charges. Given that he had recently had four meters removed, Mr C remained unhappy and complained to us.

During our investigation, Business Stream confirmed that the initial invoice that Mr C had received was based on a 'bulk' meter. This meant that it served the entire building, while the other three meters removed were 'internal' meters. Although it was not clear whether another occupier's water consumption had been included in the original bulk-metered calculation, we considered that this at least cast doubt over the accuracy of the comparison with the cost of unmetered billing. Because of this, and in light of the fact that Mr C had recently had four meters removed, we took the view that it was unreasonable for them to advise Mr C to consider reassessment. We said that, in these particular circumstances, Business Stream should have taken a more proactive approach in confirming whether Mr C's water consumption could be metered accurately and we upheld Mr C's complaints.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- consider covering the installation cost if, following reassessment, an appropriate meter proves to be cheaper and can reasonably be installed; and
- consider backdating the charges to the point of opening the account, if such a meter is installed.