

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201300775, Scottish Water  
**Sector:** water  
**Subject:** damage caused / compensation  
**Outcome:** not upheld, action taken by body to remedy, no recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C had a water blockage at her property and called a plumber in to repair it, who charged her £135. It turned out, however, that the problem was on Scottish Water's sewer, so she tried to claim the cost of the bill from them. The position, however, is that when there is a blockage customers should first contact Scottish Water, who will find out whether the problem is on their side of the system or on the customer's side (in which case the customer should then call a plumber). On the basis that customers do not always know this, however, Scottish Water offered Mrs C a goodwill payment of a proportion of the bill. Mrs C complained to us that Scottish Water had not refunded the full cost she incurred.

Our investigation found that where a customer incurs costs like this, Scottish Water have no legal obligation to refund them. Because customers pay water bills through their council tax, rather than directly to the provider, Scottish Water do not hold customer names and addresses. This means that the ways in which they can reasonably publicise messages like this are very limited. Their Code of Practice is in a booklet, in which they do advise customers to contact them first in the event of a blockage. However, as they do not have customers' details, they can only send this if requested.

We took the view that Scottish Water could not reasonably have been expected to have told Mrs C this in advance. They were, therefore, not at fault and could not be held responsible for the fact that she incurred the charges. We found that it was reasonable that they did not refund the full cost of the plumber's bill.