

SPSO decision report

Case: 201302778, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: incorrect billing
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that Business Stream delayed three years in invoicing him for water services. He believed that if they had contacted him at the start, he would not be facing such a large bill. Since receiving the invoice, Mr C had used Business Stream's website to assess probable usage during the period, had a water meter had been installed, and calculated that his usage was about half of what he was being charged. His complaint was, therefore, not only about delay but a missed opportunity to have the option of having a water meter fitted earlier. Mr C considered that Business Stream had been unreasonable in not being willing to reach an appropriate solution.

We did not uphold Mr C's complaints. Our investigation found no evidence that, after moving into the premises, he had contacted Business Stream or another water service provider. Business Stream accepted that significant time had passed before they issued an invoice, but said that Mr C could have made them aware earlier that he was using the premises, in which case they would have begun billing him sooner. They accepted that their system of identifying vacant sites had not been robust, but confirmed that in 2013 they put in place new processes, which should ensure that in future they bill customers in a more timely way.

We also found that Business Stream had fully considered Mr C's request for a reduction in his bill, and had told him that they could not do so. This was because they had (appropriately) used the rateable value of the premises to calculate usage because a water meter was not installed and because the amount of water used could not be accurately calculated. To do anything other than this would have been inconsistent with how Business Stream treated other businesses.