

SPSO decision report

Case: 201404115, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained about Business Stream's charges. She had owned a farm and had paid for its water consumption but, more recently, had sold part of the land to a third party as a residential property. Mrs C was unhappy that Business Stream had not removed water charges from her bill (for the land she still owned) that would account for the usage of the residential property. She was also unhappy that Scottish Water – the water wholesaler in Scotland - would not adopt the private water meters she had installed.

Business Stream's position was that the issue would not have arisen if, before selling off a portion of her land, Mrs C had amended her private pipe work or arranged new connections. Although we recognised that she may not have known initially about the possible problem, Business Stream's records indicated that they had made Mrs C aware of it. There was no record confirming that she had been told the average consumption of the property she had sold off would be removed from her charges.

As part of our investigation we contacted Scottish Water about possible options for future charges. They raised the possibility of deducting an average household's usage (as distinct from the usage of the specific type of property that was sold), or of them installing a sub-meter. Although we could not comment as to whether such steps would be practical or appropriate in the circumstances, this did not reflect Business Stream's position in their correspondence with Mrs C. However, Scottish Water were clear that the possibility of installing a sub-meter was a move from their traditional position. As we did not use the benefit of hindsight in considering Mrs C's complaint, there was nothing to indicate that Business Stream misadvised Mrs C or were inconsistent given the information available to them at the time. As a result, we did not uphold Mrs C's complaints but, as the underlying position with Scottish Water appeared to have since moved on, we made two recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- liaise with Mrs C and Scottish Water to explore the relevant options for future charging; and
- liaise with Scottish Water about the installation of sub-meters to ensure up-to-date information is being provided.