

SPSO decision report

Case: 201600867, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: incorrect billing
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C considered that his water bills were excessive and he contacted Business Stream to raise his concerns. Business Stream confirmed that Mr C's water meter was also supplying the premises next door. Mr C complained that Business Stream had been aware of the meter set-up for some time. Business Stream confirmed that Scottish Water had carried out a site visit some years previously and had established that Mr C was on a shared supply with his neighbours.

Both Scottish Water and Business Stream said that this was a private matter between Mr C and his neighbours. They explained that at the time of the meter installation the two properties were in one building, and that Scottish Water were under no obligation to split the supply. Business Stream told Mr C that water resale rules applied. They continued to bill Mr C, saying that he could recover charges from his neighbours. However the neighbours refused to pay Mr C any money, as they said they were also being billed by Business Stream.

Scottish Water advised Mr C that he could have a new meter installed, but that he would have to bear the cost of this.

Mr C complained to us that Business Stream unreasonably failed to notify him that his water meter was supplying a neighbouring property, unreasonably charged him while also charging his neighbours for the same supply and unreasonably delayed in responding to his complaint. We upheld each of these complaints.

We found that Business Stream ought to have notified Mr C as soon as they became aware from Scottish Water that the water supply was shared. We found that Business Stream had been misapplying water resale rules and were unreasonably charging two parties for the same supply. We found that the delay in responding to Mr C's complaint had been unreasonable.

When we told Business Stream what we intended to recommend, they agreed to arrange instalment of a new meter serving only Mr C's property, at no cost to Mr C.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for the failings identified in this investigation.
- Credit Mr C's account with an ex-gratia payment of £200.
- Assess Mr C's average usage once a new meter has been installed, serving only his property, and amend the previously issued usage to ensure that he is only billed for his own usage since October 2014.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- A policy should be put in place which would appropriately address situations similar to this, in such a way

that they cannot double-charge for the same supply. Any such policy should include guidance on assisting the customer in resolving the matter, without inappropriate reference to the Water Resale Rules. They should also conduct an audit, identifying other customers they are aware of who are also supplying a neighbouring property. Any such customers should be notified and advised of the steps they can take, with Business Stream working with them to find an acceptable way forward. They should ensure that where they become aware of any customers in the future who are also supplying a neighbouring property, notification is made and advice is given, as above.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Staff should be confident in identifying and escalating complaints, and in ensuring that complaint progression is monitored closely.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.