

SPSO decision report

Case: 201602417, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about Business Stream's handling of his water charges, and their subsequent handling of his complaint.

Mr C had an existing water account for his business premises based on a particular supply point identification number (SPID) (a reference number used to identify a water connection). A field visit was carried out by Business Stream, and a second account for Mr C was created in error based on a duplicate SPID. This resulted in a significant bill for Mr C. Business Stream recognised the error, and requested that Scottish Water remove the duplicate SPID. However, Scottish Water removed the SPID for the original account, as well as the duplicate. As a result, Business Stream requested a new SPID and account for Mr C. This was created by default as a water and waste water account, however, Mr C's original account was a water only account. He therefore, requested that the new account be amended. A significant period of time passed during which the account was assessed by Business Stream and Scottish Water.

Mr C complained to us that Business Stream had:

unreasonably charged him when he had no SPID

unreasonably had the new account created for him following the field visit

unreasonably charged him under the duplicate account

had a new account created as a water and waste water account, which meant that Mr C was unreasonably charged for waste water which he was not liable for

handled his complaint unreasonably

Business Stream acknowledged that there had been a number of failings in the case, but noted that, following the removal of the accounts, they had effectively provided credit for approximately five years, and had made a further payment to Mr C in recognition of his experience.

We took independent advice from a chartered engineer with experience in the water industry. We upheld three of Mr C's five complaints. We found that Business Stream appropriately levied charges prior to the time that the second account was opened. We also found that it was reasonable for Business Stream to charge Mr C under the new account once this was created, as this was consistent with the rules under the Market Code. We did not uphold these two aspects of Mr C's complaint.

We found that Business Stream should have requested the new SPID and account as water only, given that this was to replace Mr C's previous account. We found that it was unreasonable of Business Stream to create the new

account following the field visit. We also identified a number of failings in the handling of Mr C's complaint, including delay, the limited consideration of the field visit issue, and some failures to respond to correspondence. We upheld these three aspects of Mr C's complaint and made a number of recommendations to address these issues.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Business Stream should apologise to Mr C for the failings in the handling of his accounts and the failings we identified in the complaints process. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at <https://www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance>.
- Provide Mr C with an explanation for the extent of the bill he received after the new account was opened.

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

- Field agents should collect appropriate information and know how to correctly determine whether a property is paying charges or not so that duplicate accounts are not set up in error.
- There should be systems in place between Business Stream and Scottish Water to ensure requests to deregister SPID numbers are handled correctly.
- Where default SPID numbers are created, they should accurately reflect the services provided to the property.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Complaints should be handled in a timely manner, and a full response covering all of the issues raised should be provided.

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.