

SPSO decision report

Case: 201806416, Scottish Water
Sector: water
Subject: replacement of lead / rusted pipes
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that Scottish Water (SW) delayed in reinstating a permanent water supply to his property and that their communication in relation to this matter was unreasonable.

Mr C requested a mains supply lead replacement. After completing works, the new pipes were attached to the water supply system. Shortly afterwards, his neighbours reported that they had no water. It was established that during the works at Mr C's property, the joint supply to his neighbours had been cut. Mr C was unhappy because he said that he had been misled by SW into believing that the water supply at this property was not a joint one. SW considered that a public health issue had arisen as the neighbours' water supply had been disrupted and they took action to install a temporary overland water supply. They also apologised for the incorrect information they had given. At the same time, they detailed the works they would carry out to renew the existing pipework to the rear of Mr C's property and to the boundary of each of his neighbours (SW are only responsible for the water main in the street and communication pipe up to and including the stop-cock. The water supply to individual premises inside a property boundary is the responsibility of the property owner).

It was SW's view that, notwithstanding any incorrect information they may have given Mr C, it was in fact his responsibility to establish the actual situation with regard to the supply pipes; they did not hold records about these nor were they part of the public supply network. Their role in this was only to remove the lead pipe belonging to them and lay a new pipe from the public water main to the boundary of Mr C's property where it connected to the private pipework. The temporary mains pipe was laid and it was not until a year later that it was removed.

We found that despite any incorrect information SW may have given, it was Mr C's responsibility to determine whether or not his water supply was shared. Delays were caused by this, but they were not of SW's making. Therefore, we did not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

In relation to communication, we found that there was a great deal of confusion by SW in the way they dealt with the correspondence and there were omissions and delays in sending replies. Therefore, we upheld this aspect of the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for the failure to communicate in a reasonable way. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

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

- Correspondence, including complaints correspondence, should be acknowledged and responded to in

accordance with stated policies.

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.