

SPSO decision report

Case: 201104517, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: incorrect billing
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

In 2012, Mr C received a water bill from Business Stream that was much higher than he had expected. The bill was for the water supply to a trough on his farm which had been switched off since the summer of 2011. The meter for this supply was located in Mr C's neighbour's house, but he did not have access to it. Because of this, he was unable to monitor his water usage and was unaware that there was a leak in his pipework. Mr C complained to us that the bill was too high and that, had his meter been located in a more accessible position, and had accurate bills been issued by Business Stream rather than estimates, he could have identified the leak sooner. He did not consider that he should be liable for the full amount of the water bill.

Mr C's water meter was relocated by Scottish Water on behalf of Business Stream to a more accessible position. After the work was completed, he was presented with an invoice for the relocation work which he found excessive. He was told that if he chose not to pay the invoice, the meter would be moved back to its previous location at no cost.

We did not uphold Mr C's complaint. It is the customer's responsibility to check for and repair any leaks on their pipework. Where leaks are not immediately visible, the best way to monitor water usage is to examine the water meter and any bills that are issued. We accepted that the location of Mr C's water meter restricted his ability to check for leaks, but did not find evidence of any clear request from Mr C to have his meter moved to a more accessible location. However, we did not find that the delay in moving the meter impacted significantly on the water charges that Mr C incurred.

We were satisfied that meter readings were taken in line with Business Stream's meter reading policy which requires two actual readings to be taken in a twelve month period. As such, we did not find that there was any specific action that Business Stream could have taken to help Mr C identify his leak any sooner.

We found it reasonable for Scottish Water to apply charges for relocating the meter and that these should be met by the customer. However, Mr C should have been told about the cost prior to the work being carried out. Scottish Water accepted this and agreed to leave the meter in its new location without pursuing Mr C for any costs associated with its relocation.