

Case: 201102346, Business Stream Ltd
Sector: Scottish Government and devolved administration
Subject: incorrect billing
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C runs a business that Scottish Water identified as receiving water without being billed. Business Stream took over the provision of water to the business in November 2010 and in January 2011 sent Mrs C a bill for outstanding water charges, which she found to be excessive. She asked for a water meter to be fitted to the premises so that she would only be billed for water used but, following a survey by Scottish Water, she was advised that this was not possible. Mrs C arranged for a plumber to inspect the pipework and he concluded that a meter could be fitted. This was done in June 2011. Mrs C complained that the water charges that accrued before the meter's installation were unreasonable and that the meter could have been installed several months earlier, lowering the costs.

Where no meter is in place, water charges are calculated on the rateable value of the property. We found it appropriate for these rates to apply up to the date of the meter being installed. In Mrs C's case, we were satisfied that the charges accrued prior to her meter being installed were in line with Business Stream's published rates. That said, during their inspection of Mrs C's premises, Scottish Water failed to identify that her pipework was suitable for the installation of a meter. They maintained this even after she highlighted her plumber's findings. We, therefore, concluded that there was an avoidable delay to the meter's installation.

Where Scottish Water are unable to fit a water meter, they will offer a contribution payment toward the cost of upgrading pipework so that installation can go ahead. Mrs C was offered a contribution of £750 and this was confirmed on more than one occasion. Scottish Water subsequently withdrew the offer, as no upgrade was required. We found Scottish Water's communication about this to be poor, but that a good will gesture already offered by Business Stream was appropriate recompense. We also upheld Mrs C's complaint that Business

Stream's complaint handling was poor and found that they had failed to offer her a £20 credit in line with their service standards.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- recalculate Mrs C's water charges for the relevant period based on her metered usage and adjust the balance of her account accordingly; and
- credit Mrs C's account with a further £20 in light of the failings identified.