

SPSO decision report

Case: 201204030, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C's wife runs a business. He said that she suddenly received an invoice from Business Stream for three years' water services, amounting to over £3000. Mr C said that neither he nor his wife had been approached by Business Stream or anyone acting on their behalf, despite the business being open for long hours every day, but a third party company had, inappropriately, approached their neighbours. Mr C said that it was unreasonable for Business Stream to issue an invoice without any prior communication by phone or letter explaining their charges.

Our investigation found that Business Stream have no procedure or policy document setting out what is expected of those whose job it is to trace the customer responsible for a property recorded as vacant, but which appeared to be occupied. They told us, however, that the initial contact would always be direct with the customer. Business Stream confirmed that a third party had spoken to one of Mr C's neighbours. We found no evidence that there had been any difficulty in contacting Mr C or his wife, and found that Business Stream's expectation of how a third party company would operate was not met. We found also that it was unreasonable to issue an invoice without any prior contact with Mr C or his wife.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- apologise to Mr and Mrs C for the failings identified in our investigation;
- deduct £100 from Mrs C's account;
- implement a procedure for the companies acting for them to follow when making enquiries about commercial premises that appear to be operating without a water service provider;
- ensure that any queries Mr C made about the charges have been addressed before re-issuing their invoice; and
- implement a procedure where letters of introduction and explanation are issued to new customers with the issue of the first invoice.