

SPSO decision report

Case: 201300609, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: incorrect billing
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C's company owned several office units at one address and a series of warehouse units at another. He complained about the rateable value (RV) Business Stream used for charging his properties at the first address and also about his difficulties in resolving a separate billing query at the second.

We upheld both of Mr C's complaints. The key issue about the RV was whether Business Stream should use the valuation from 2000 or 2012. Their policy said that the RV from 2000 was the default – although there were exceptions to this – but they said that, in this case, they were entitled to use the 2012 valuation. Mr C maintained that, because the properties had not been physically modified since they were built and had simply been leased to one tenant, they were wrong to use the 2012 valuation. After considering the evidence, on balance, we took the view that Business Stream's use of the 2012 RV was not in accordance with their RV policy.

There had been a considerable amount of correspondence about the billing query involved in the second complaint. Mr C had been in touch with several staff members and there was a delay because of their initial view about the charges involved. Business Stream then made enquiries of their wholesaler and changed their view on this. Although the issue was resolved we found that, on balance, their administrative handling of this fell below a reasonable standard.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- recalculate and backdate Mr C's account based on the appropriate rateable value in line with their rateable value policy; and
- apologise to Mr C for the unreasonable delay in resolving his complaints about their charges.