

SPSO decision report

Case: 201302734, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: incorrect billing
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained that Business Stream were unreasonably pursuing her for water bills in excess of the service she was receiving from them for a small art studio she was renting. She said that she did not have a water supply there, but did have shared use of a toilet and sink. Ms C also said that some tenants had only been billed for surface water and drainage and others had not been billed at all.

Business Stream had told Ms C that where there are several units with their own rateable value using the same communal facilities, this can be charged in one of two ways. The first is where a bulk meter is in place serving the full property. This can be invoiced directly to the property owner if they agree to this and each tenant then pays for their own property and roads drainage, with the property owner recouping water and waste water charges from the tenants through a service charge. The second is where there is not a meter, and each tenant is charged for the full unmeasured services based on the rateable value of the unit that they occupy. In response to our enquiries, Business Stream sent us a copy of an email they had received from the property owner. This said that he did not want the water for the building to be metered. The property owner also said that they stressed to all tenants that their water rates were calculated using the rateable value of their individual studios.

We found that it had been reasonable for Business Stream to calculate Ms C's bill using the rateable value for the studio. This was in line with their billing policy and the rules that govern all providers in the non-domestic water industry in Scotland. In view of this, we did not uphold the complaint. Business Stream also confirmed to us that they had not been billing tenants of the building consistently, and that they were taking action to resolve this. They had asked for the accounts of properties that were not being charged for water, waste water and drainage to be reopened, as they had been closed incorrectly.