

SPSO decision report

Case: 201303369, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: charging method / calculation
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C owned a property, which she ran as a self-catering holiday let. In 2009 Scottish Water contacted her and explained that a water meter should be installed so that the business's water usage could be properly managed and charged. A meter was installed, but Mrs C was led to believe that her business used insufficient water to merit charges. In 2012, and again in 2013, Business Stream identified her property, through routine audits, as receiving water services without being charged (this is known as a gap site). Although Mrs C responded to their enquiries, they did not create a water account for the property until July 2013. Mrs C complained that she was firstly misled into believing there would be no water charges and that Business Stream then delayed setting up her water account, leading to a large unexpected water bill backdated to 2009.

We found that Mrs C was given appropriate information in 2009 about changes to the non-domestic water industry and the need to select a licensed provider to manage her business water usage. She missed an opportunity to select a provider at that stage, which contributed to the overall delay in the account being set up. However, when the property was identified as a gap site, we found there was then a clear delay on Business Stream's part in creating an account and starting to charge her for water. We were critical that there was also a lot of confusion about whether or not there was a meter in place, when there clearly was.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- apologise to Mrs C for the delay to setting up her water account and the confusion surrounding the amounts that should have been charged; and
- reimburse Mrs C 50 percent of the property's total water charges for the stated period.