

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201400034, Business Stream  
**Sector:** water  
**Subject:** charging method / calculation  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C's business occupies premises on the ground floor of a building. Mr C also used to own a property on the floor above. This second property was unoccupied until Mr C sold it to its current owner in 2011. The properties share a water supply and meter, which Business Stream used to bill Mr C for his current business premises. However, due to the shared supply he was also billed for the water used in the second property. Business Stream also charged the new owner of the second property for unmeasured/estimated charges, effectively charging two customers for the same water supply. Business Stream became aware of the shared supply in August 2012, and Mr C told us that in November 2012 he was advised to install a sub-meter to measure the water usage at the second property, which would be used to bill the user. Mr C installed the meter but was later advised that it would not be read and could not be used for billing purposes. Mr C complained that he had been incorrectly advised about installing the meter and that he was being unreasonably billed for water used at the second property.

We found no evidence that Business Stream had advised Mr C beforehand that although he could install a private sub-meter at his own expense to measure the usage at the second property, it would not be used for billing purposes. We were critical that many of the staff he dealt with did not appear to be aware of the policy on sub-meters, and that the call logs did not accurately note what advice he was given. During our investigation we also discovered that Business Stream had applied a section of their billing policy relating to landlords and tenants. We did not consider that this applied in Mr C's case and found that they had no policy that specifically related to shared supplies for properties with different owners. We upheld his complaint and were also critical that Business Stream did not tell him how he could fix the double billing issue when they became aware of the shared supply.

### Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- take steps to ensure that their frontline staff are fully aware of the policy on sub-meters;
- take steps to ensure that information provided during calls is accurately reflected in the event log;
- refund Mr C the cost of the sub-meter and its installation;
- reconsider whether their policies allow for situations similar to these and ensure that we are kept updated in their discussions with the Scottish Government about shared supplies; and
- refund Mr C an amount equal to the unmeasured charges billed in the period we investigated.