

SPSO decision report

Case: 201403182, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: meter reading
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

In 2010, Mrs C's business was identified as a vacant site (a premises where one occupant has vacated and the next has not opened a water account). Business Stream created an account and charged based on an estimated meter reading. Mrs C was told several times that meter readers had been unable to find her meter as it was under rubble. In 2012, the meter was found and replaced due to its age. The new meter was installed with a reading of zero and was read again in December 2013. Mrs C subsequently received an unexpectedly high bill. She complained about the amount she was charged, arguing that the new meter could not have been installed with a reading of zero as her small business could not have used the volume of water that had been alleged. She also complained about the lack of meter readings carried out by Business Stream and the fact that she had not been notified of the new meter's installation.

We found that, although the account had been created using an estimated reading, this was recalculated at a later date using appropriate, verifiable, information. High water usage was recorded through the old meter and continued to be recorded through the new meter with no evidence of a shared supply or a leak. Once the issue was identified, the water usage dropped dramatically. We were satisfied that Business Stream charged appropriately based on the meter information. However, we found that they failed to take two meter readings per year as required by industry rules. This meant that Mrs C was denied the opportunity to identify the high water usage and address the problem before high bills were accrued. We were satisfied that Business Stream were under no obligation to forewarn Mrs C of the meter exchange.

Recommendations

We recommended that Business Stream:

- calculate the company's average daily consumption from the 7 January 2014 meter reading onward and retrospectively apply this to the company's account from 9 October 2010 (six months after the account was created) to 17 December 2013 (the date of the last delayed meter reading).