

# WATRS

## Water Redress Scheme

### ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /0661

Date of Decision: 21 February 2018

#### Complaint

The customer received a high bill in March 2017 and disputes that it is accurate. The customer's usage recorded after the high bill is lower than their estimated usage had been. The customer submits that the meter may have been mixed up with that of the neighbouring quarry.

#### Defence

The customer's bills were based on estimated readings from 4 June 2015 until 28 February 2017. At this point a 'catch-up' bill was issued as the customer's actual usage exceeded the estimate. The billing is correct and a payment plan has been set up. The customer's meter was read in line with the policy that it should be read at least once during a billing year.

No offer of settlement was made.

#### Findings

There was an extended period where the customer's bills were based on estimated readings. The actual usage recorded by the customer's meter was higher than the estimates. There was no evidence to suggest the meter was faulty or that the reading was inaccurate. The customer's recorded usage after the high bill demonstrated lower daily usage, suggesting no fault with the meter. The bill was, on the balance of probabilities, accurate.

#### Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

The customer must reply by 21 March 2018 to accept or reject this decision.

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# ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /0661

Date of Decision: 21 February 2018

## Party Details

Customer: [REDACTED]

Company: [REDACTED]

## Case Outline

### **The customer's complaint is that:**

- The customer received a high bill for £802.05 on 7 March 2017. Before this, the customer's bills had been around £324.21. The customer's bill for 27 May to 21 August 2017 is only £290.70. The company has been unable to provide any explanation for the high bill. The customer submits that her meter may have been mixed up with that owned by a neighbouring quarry as only one number of the reference number is different. Alternatively, the company may be trying to recoup some money between the previous estimated price and the new price, a difference of £13.32 over a two-year period. This would not equal the price increase on 1 January 2017.
- The customer requests an apology and a reduction in the bill as it cannot be explained.

### **The company's response is that:**

- The company states that the customer logged a complaint on 30 May 2017 about the invoice for £802.05. The company was unaware that the balance was in dispute with RST Water prior to the account transferring to the company on 1 April 2017. The company investigated the complaint and attempted to contact the customer. It verified the meter details and ensured that there was no mix up between the customer and the quarry. The customer is not on a joint supply with the quarry and is being billed on the correct meter. The company raised a query with RST Water to see if there was a failure in the service standards as the meter had not been read between 4 June 2015 and 28 February 2017. RST Water advised its policy is to read the meter once in a billing year and that it had done so. The company has explained how the balance up

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to 28 February 2017 had accrued. A payment plan was confirmed on 18 October 2017 to clear the outstanding balance of £1430.07 at £120.00 per month.

### How is a WATRS decision reached?

In reaching my decision, I have considered two key issues. These are:

1. Whether the company failed to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person.
2. Whether or not the customer has suffered any financial loss or other disadvantage as a result of a failing by the company.

If the evidence provided by the parties does not prove both of these issues, the company will not be directed to do anything.

I have carefully considered all of the evidence provided. If I have not referred to a particular document or matter specifically, this does not mean that I have not considered it in reaching my decision.

### How was this decision reached?

1. The customer received a high bill for £802.05 from RST Water dated 7 March 2017. I note that, as a business customer, the customer's account was transferred to ABC Ltd from 1 April 2017. I am satisfied that the company took over responsibility for billing and that the entire dispute can be dealt with against ABC Ltd as the company that is pursuing payment.
2. The company has provided evidence of each bill amount, commencing with the bill dated 18 September 2015. I note that each bill was made up of an estimated meter reading, with actual meter readings taking place on 4 June 2015 and 28 February 2017 only.
3. I am mindful that an estimated reading will be based on the usage over the previous 12 months. However, as an estimated value, it is possible that a customer's usage will be higher or lower than the estimate. It follows that, once an actual meter reading is taken, the next bill will reflect actual usage over the entire period for which estimates were used and may result in a 'catch-up' bill for higher usage or a reduced bill or refund may be due where the actual usage is below the estimates.

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4. In this case, the customer's meter was not read for a period of 635 days. Six bills had been issued to the customer based on estimated readings. I am mindful that an extended period between readings increases the probability of a discrepancy between the estimated and actual usage.
5. The evidence shows that, by 28 February 2017, a total of 2434m<sup>3</sup> of water had been used. This is 3.833m<sup>3</sup> of water per day. The company had been billing the customer based on usage estimates of 3.303m<sup>3</sup> of water per day. The actual meter reading showed that the customer had used an average of 0.53m<sup>3</sup> more water per day than had been estimated.
6. I acknowledge that no reason for the increased water usage, recorded by the water meter, has been established. However, there is no suggestion within the evidence that the water meter is faulty. I note that a meter reading was taken on 3 July 2017 of 9953. This demonstrated usage of 2.904m<sup>3</sup> of water per day over the 125 day period between 28 February and 3 July 2017. The reduction of actual usage indicates that there is not any leak or other fault with the water meter that would cause it to record abnormally high usage.
7. In reviewing the evidence, I find no discrepancy of billing that would explain the high bill. The evidence shows that the customer's account was based on estimated bills for a period of almost two years. With the customer's usage not being accurately tracked with meter readings during this time, I find that it is most likely that the customer's usage did increase, on average, over the period of estimated bills and that this resulted in a large catch-up bill once the meter was actually read.
8. I find that it is poor that the meter was not read more frequently, however I note that it was read in line with the RST Water standard of once per tax year. I also note that the meter readings at this time were the responsibility of RST Water and not the company.
9. I also note that the company has agreed a payment plan with the customer to allow her to spread the payment of the high bill. I find no reason for the bill to be reduced as, from the evidence provided, I am satisfied that it accurately reflects the customer's usage between 4 June 2015 and 28 February 2017, less the estimated usage already billed. In light of the above, I do not find that the company has failed to provide the service to the standard expected of an

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ordinary water supplier. I therefore find that the customer is not entitled to the remedies requested.

#### **Outcome**

The company does not need to take any further action.

#### **What happens next?**

- This adjudication decision is final and cannot be appealed or amended.
- The customer must reply by 21 March 2018 to accept or reject this decision.
- When you tell WATRS that you accept or reject the decision, the company will be notified of this. The case will then be closed.
- If you do not tell WATRS that you accept or reject the decision, this will be taken to be a rejection of the decision.

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**Alison Dablin**, LLM, MSc, MCI Arb

**Adjudicator**

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