

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X305

Date of Decision: 31/05/2021

Party Details

Customer: The Customer

Company: X Company

Complaint

The customer believes that his water bill of £70.00 per month is too high for his household of four. The customer raised his concerns with the company and the meter has been replaced; however, he believes the new meter may be over-recording, and he suspects that it may be recording his neighbour's water consumption as well as his own. The customer wants the company to reduce the balance on his account and remove the meter.

Response

The company has not provided a full response, however, the evidence shows that the company has found that the customer's meter is recording correctly, there are no leaks, and the supply is not shared. Therefore, the company believes that the charges are correct and payable. The company also says that as the property is metered, the customer's account cannot be returned to unmetered charging.

The company has not made an offer of settlement.

Findings

There is no evidence to show that the customer's meter is over-recording or that the charges on his account are incorrect. Therefore, I do not find that the company has failed to provide its service to the standard reasonably expected by the average customer, and I find the charges are correct and payable. Also, I accept that under Ofwat guidelines, the customer cannot return to unmetered charging as his property is fitted with a meter. In view of this, the customer's claim cannot succeed.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

The customer must reply by 29/06/2021 to accept or reject this decision.

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Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- He has been complaining to the company about his high bills for the last three years and the company previously agreed to reduce his charges to £40.00 per month, but they have recently been put up to £70.00. He believes that the water consumption shown on his meter is too high because there are only four people in his household and they are all out for most of the day.
- He has raised his concerns with the company and the meter has been replaced; however, he believes the new meter may be over-recording and he suspects that it may be attached to a neighbouring property as well as his own.
- The Customer Care Manager calculated his annual consumption to be in the region of 162 cubic metres. According to the company's consumption calculator, this would equate to approximately £466.21 per year, or £38.00 per month, which he is happy to pay. The weekly breakdown of use for this is approximately fifty toilet flushes, sixteen baths, seven showers, seven washing loads, six full sinks and five garden hoses.
- If the figures were doubled to 292 cubic metres, which is still less than he is being billed for, the breakdown of usage is one hundred toilet flushes, thirty-two baths, fourteen showers, fourteen washing loads, twelve full sinks, and ten garden hoses. His household of four people cannot possibly use this amount of water as they are out all day; therefore, his bills must be wrong.
- His friends and family who live in the same postcode have similar sized households and only pay approximately £40.00 per month.
- He wants the company to reduce the balance on his account and remove the meter.

The company's response is that:

- The company has not given a full response to the customer's claim, but has provided logger results, meter testing results, and a document showing the average daily usage for varying sized households.
- However, the documentation provided by CCW includes the company's response to the CCW investigation. In this document, the company states that in August 2018, the customer received a six-monthly bill for £525.00 for 208 cubic metres of water. The customer queried this bill and the company checked the customer's supply for leaks and checked that the supply was not shared. The investigation confirmed that there were no leaks and the supply was not shared.
- On 26 November 2018, the meter was removed and tested, but the meter was found to be working correctly. To help the customer, the company agreed an allowance for the high period of consumption between 9 February 2018 and 31 July 2018. The company also installed a logger for a week, but this did not identify any internal issues.
- Recent

meter readings show that the customer's average daily usage is now less than it was before the meter was exchanged, and the company believes that the charges are correct and payable. • The balance on the customer's account on 20 January 2021 was £411.93, and the company has offered the customer an extended payment plan to cover his current charges and the outstanding balance. • The evidence shows that the company will not remove the meter as requested by the customer because, under Ofwat guidelines, once a property is fitted with a meter, a customer's account cannot be returned to unmetered charging.

How is a WATRS decision reached?

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

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

In order for the customer's claim against the company to succeed, the evidence available to the adjudicator must show on a balance of probabilities that the company has failed to provide its services to the standard one would reasonably expect and that as a result of this failure the customer has suffered some loss or detriment. If no such failure or loss is shown, the company will not be liable.

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 believes his charges are too high for his household, but I can only direct the company to reduce the customer's charges if the evidence shows that, on the balance of probabilities, the charges are incorrect, and the company has failed to provide its service to the standard reasonably expected by the average customer by refusing to reduce them.
2. Having reviewed the evidence, including the meter testing report, the logger results and the documentation provided by CCW, I find nothing to suggest that the customer's meter is over-recording or that the charges on his account are incorrect; the meter testing results show that the old meter was working correctly, the logger results do not identify a leak, the new meter reads show an approximate consumption of 250 cubic metres per year, which is in line with the expected usage for a household of four, although I accept it is at the higher end of the usage scale, and there is no evidence of a shared supply.

3. Therefore, I cannot find that the charges on the customer's account are incorrect, or that the company has failed to provide its service to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average customer by basing the customer's charges on the meter reads and refusing to reduce his bills.

4. The customer wants his meter removed as he would like to return to unmetered billing; however, I accept that under the guidelines issued by Ofwat, the industry regulator, once a property has a meter installed, a customer cannot return to unmetered billing.

5. In view of the above, while I appreciate that my decision will disappoint the customer, his claim for reduced charges and unmetered billing cannot succeed.

Outcome

1. 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 within 20 working days to accept or reject this final 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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Kate Wilks
Adjudicator