

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X430

Date of Decision: 23/07/2021

Party Details

Customer:

Company:

Complaint

The customer claims that he has been previously incorrectly charged for excess water consumption, which he alleges is due to either a faulty meter, shared supply or a leak. The customer is seeking the company to relocate his meter internally, adjust his previous charges and provide compensation for poor customer service.

Response

The company says it has undertaken investigations at the customer's home which proved there were no external leaks and that the property has a supply that is not shared with any other property. As no valid reason has been found to question the consumption being recorded on the customer's meter, the customer's consumption has been recorded correctly, and the customer correctly charged. Therefore, the company finds no reason to relocate the customer's meter. The company has not made any further offers of settlement.

Findings

I am satisfied the company did not fail to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected concerning whether the customer has been correctly charged. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings regarding customer service as the company has provided a good level of service throughout its dialogue with the customer. Consequently, the customer's claim does not succeed.

Outcome

The company needs to take no further action.

The customer must reply by 20/08/2021 to accept or reject this decision.

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Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

• He has been previously incorrectly charged for excess water consumption, which he alleges is due to either a faulty meter, shared supply, or a leak. • The customer is seeking the company to relocate his meter internally, recalculate his previous charges and provide compensation for poor customer service.

The company's response is that:

• It has undertaken investigations at the customer's home which proved there were no external leaks and that the property has a supply that isn't shared with any other property. • The customer made an application for the company's REDACTED tariff because they use more water than an average household due to medical conditions; therefore, it is reasonable to expect the customer's usage to be higher than average for a four-person household. • As no valid reason has been found to question the consumption being recorded on the customer's meter, the customer's consumption has been recorded correctly. • Therefore, the company finds no reason to relocate the customer's meter.

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 dispute centres on whether the customer's original high charges were due to a faulty meter, shared supply, or a leak on the company's pipework.
2. The company must meet the standards set out in OFWAT's Charges Scheme Rules, the Water Supply and Sewerage Services (Customer Service Standards) Regulations 2008 and the Water Industry Act 1991.
3. Furthermore, the company also has certain obligations regarding its customer services as set out in the OFWAT Guaranteed Standards Scheme and its Customer Guarantee Scheme.
4. Under Section 142 to 143 of the Water Industry Act 1991, the company is permitted to charge for water and wastewater services provided and make a Charges Scheme which essentially fixes charges to be paid for services provided. However, as made clear at WATRS Rule 3.5, "any matters over which OFWAT has powers to determine an outcome" cannot be considered by WATRS. The question of whether a company has adhered to Section 142 to 143 of the Water Industry Act 1991 is a matter for OFWAT to determine, and therefore I will make no findings on this matter in this decision.
5. From the evidence put forward by the customer and the company, I understand that in January 2019, the customer contacted the company as he had concerns about his meter, which he believed may capture another property's supply. The evidence shows that the company attended the customer's property on eleven occasions, between January and September 2019, to assist the customer in investigating their concerns. The result of the company's investigations was that there was no evidence to suggest that the customer's property is on a shared supply, nor any evidence of the supply leaking.
6. The evidence shows that a meter logging exercise was undertaken between 13 and 26 May 2020, after further enquiries by the customer concerning high charges. In this instance, as shown by the meter logging report within the company response, there is no evidence of a constant leak at the customer's property. However, the report did indicate that there may be a tiny element of leakage on the customer's private pipework.
7. Following further discussions, the evidence shows that the company replaced the customer's meter on 3 September 2020 to ensure that there were no issues with the original meter. I understand that the customer usage between 3 September 2020 and 25 January 2021 falls in line with the usage recorded through the last meter and suggests that the previous meter had been recording accurately.

8. On 19 November 2020, the customer contacted the company via CCWater to raise further concerns regarding his charges. As a result of the discussions with CCWater, the company confirmed that it was unwilling to install an internal meter at the customer's property. However, the company suggested an alternative to backdate the customer's capped tariff to when he took up occupancy of his home. I understand that this has now been applied to the customer's account. However, the customer remained unhappy, and on 8 June 2021, commenced the WATRS adjudication process.

9. Regarding the customer's comments, he has been overcharged and for the company to install an internal meter at the customer's property. As shown by the company's response documentation, the company has undertaken numerous supply investigations at the customer's property since January 2019. Each investigation proved there were no external leaks, and that the property has a supply that is not shared with any other property. Furthermore, although it did indicate that there may be a tiny element of leakage on the customer's private pipework, the meter logging exercise in May 2020 showed no evidence of a constant leak at the customer's property. Accordingly, I find that the consumption being recorded through the meter accurately reflects the customer's consumption.

10. Furthermore, I understand that following CCWater's involvement, the company has backdated the customer's REDACTED tariff to the date the customer moved into the property as part of a settlement agreement. Therefore, the evidence shows that the customer has not been billed for the usage recorded through the meter as the customer's charges are capped, regardless of usage. I understand the company will continue to read the meter, but it will not be used for billing purposes.

11. As shown by the company's response documents, the meter is already located within a suitable location. After careful review of all the evidence, I can find that I agree with the company's position that there are no grounds to move the meter inside the property as this would result in the company adopting responsibility for the customer's private supply pipework between its current location and any proposed new location.

12. In light of the above, the fact that the customer's usage is above average, the usage recorded on two of the meters has been near-identical, and the customer's charges are now capped, regardless of usage, I find that the company has not failed to provide its services to the standard one would reasonably expect concerning its charges. Accordingly, I find the company does not have to relocate the customer's water meter.

13. The company has certain obligations in respect of its customer services. From the evidence provided, I am satisfied that by the end of the company's dialogue

with the customer, the company had adequately explained what action the company had undertaken to discover whether it had incorrectly charged for excess water consumption. Furthermore, on reviewing the various correspondence, I believe that the company dealt with the customer's concerns efficiently and appropriately, considering the circumstances.

14. Considering the above, I am satisfied the company did not fail to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected concerning whether the customer has been correctly charged. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings concerning customer service, as the company has provided a good level of service throughout its dialogue with the customer.

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.

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Mark Ledger
Adjudicator