

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X607

Date of Final Decision: 26 October 2021

Party Details

Customer:

Company:

Complaint

The customer claims that the company cannot fit a water meter due to a tap connected to her water supply serving the company's pumping station located behind her property. This has led to increased charges as she is being charged for the supply to the pumping station, which is connected to her supply, as all the other properties connected to the same supply have water meters fitted. In addition to this, she is expected to contact the company if there is an issue with the pumping station. The customer is seeking a reduction of 50% of her water bills for inconvenience and distress caused.

Response

The company says it has correctly provided the customer with the lowest possible tariff applicable to her situation and where a meter cannot be fitted to her property. The company appreciates the customer letting it know when there is an issue with the pumping station. However, the company already has alarms that alert it to any problems, so this is unnecessary. The company has not made any offers of settlement.

Findings

I am satisfied the evidence shows that the customer has not proven the company failed to provide its services to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person concerning being unable to fit a water meter or its charges. However, I am satisfied there have been failings concerning customer service, for which the customer has not been adequately compensated.

Outcome

The company shall pay the customer the sum of £20.00.

The customer must reply by 23 November 2021 to accept or reject this decision.

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Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The company cannot fit a water meter due to a tap connected to her water supply serving the company's pumping station behind her property.
- This has led to increased charges as she is being charged for the supply to the pumping station, which is connected to her supply, as all the other properties connected to the same supply have water meters fitted.
- In addition to this, she is expected to contact the company if there is an issue with the pumping station.
- The customer is seeking a reduction of 50% of her water bills.

The company's response is that:

- It has correctly provided the customer with the lowest possible tariff applicable to her situation and where a meter cannot be fitted to her property.
- The company appreciates the customer letting it know when there is an issue with the pumping station.
- However, the company already has alarms that alert it to such issues, so this is unnecessary.

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 another disadvantage as a result of a failure by the company.

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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 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 company cannot fit a water meter due to a tap connected to her water supply serving the company's pumping station, which has led to increased charges.
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. The company also has certain obligations regarding its customer services as set out in OFWAT Guaranteed Standards Scheme and its own Customer Guarantee Scheme (CGS).
4. The evidence shows that on 20 May 2016, the previous occupier of the customer's property had applied for a water meter to be fitted. The company attended the property and found that it was unable to fit a meter to the supply that captured only the usage at the property as the supply also tees off to a tap located at the company's wastewater pumping station behind the property.
5. The tariff at the property was subsequently changed to the Assessed Household Charge, which is a reduced unmetered charge for customers who have applied for a water meter but have been unable to have one fitted.
6. On 21 August 2020, the customer contacted the company to inform it that with effect from 18 August 2020, she was now the occupier of the property. The evidence shows that an account was opened for her, and a bill for the period 18 August 2020 to 31 March 2021 using the Assessed Household Charge, Single Occupier Tariff, was issued.

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7. I understand the same day, the customer requested that the company undertake another meter survey to see whether a meter could be fitted. The customer believed that she was being charged for the supply to the pumping station, which was connected to her supply, as all the other properties connected to the same supply had water meters fitted.
8. On 14 December 2020, the customer contacted the company to inquire about her water meter request. The evidence shows that the customer was informed that her request had been closed as the company had previously surveyed the property and found that it could not fit a water meter. The customer was dissatisfied with the company's response and requested another engineer to make another assessment.
9. As the property had already been deemed as unable to have a meter fitted in the past, the request was sent to the company's back-office team to review. An application form for the company's help scheme which, if the customer is eligible for, reduces their annual bills by 50%, was also sent to the customer.
10. Following further contact by the customer, the company organised a meter survey for 11 March 2021. However, the customer denied the company access to the property due to COVID-19 concerns and the fact that her daughter was shielding. On 12 March 2021, the company contacted the customer to arrange another survey. However, the customer believed that the company did not need to enter her property as her supply was a shared supply with the pumping station. The company advised the customer that this is information that its engineer would not have until such time as her property had been fully surveyed.
11. I understand that the customer continued to believe that she was being charged too much as she was on a shared supply with the company's pumping station. The customer was still of the view that she was being charged for the supply to the pumping station, which was connected to her supply, as all the other properties connected to the same supply had water meters fitted. The customer remained dissatisfied with how the company had handled her complaint, and on 12 March 2021, she progressed her complaint to CCW to resolve.
12. The evidence shows that during the company's dialogue with CCW, it was explained that without an up-to-date internal survey of the property, the company could not amend the customer's billing, and as matters stand, the customer's Assessed Household Charge was correct as the company had previously surveyed the property and found that it could not fit a water meter. If,

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after an internal survey, it is found that the company can now install a water meter, the company would amend the customer's billing method and charges. The customer remained unhappy and, on 19 August 2021, commenced the WATRS adjudication process.

13. As to whether the company correctly charged the customer on its single occupier Assessed Household Charge, from the evidence put forward by the company, the Assessed Household Charge is only applied after a request for a meter has been made and the company is unable to either install the meter or use the meter for recording consumption at the property in question. The evidence shows in this instance, the company was unable to use the meter for recording consumption at the property, as due to the nature of the customer's property, it would also record the pumping station consumption. An internal meter could not be fitted at the time due to the customer's private pipework location. Therefore, the company was correct in applying the Assessed Household Charge at the customer's property.
14. I note the customer's comments that she was being charged for water used by the pumping station, which is connected to her supply, as all the other properties connected to the same supply had water meters fitted. However, after a careful review of all the documentation put forward, I can find no evidence to support this claim. The Assessed Household Charge is based on the typical amount of water used by customers in homes with a similar number of bedrooms to the customer. The Assessed Household Charge completely ignores any consumption by the company's pumping station. So, if the other properties connected to the same supply had the same number of bedrooms, then the customer would be paying a similar amount. However, as every property and occupier's consumption is different, variation would still occur.
15. Considering the above and after careful review of all the evidence, I find the company has not failed to provide its services to the standard one would reasonably expect regarding installing a water meter and the Assessed Household Charge. Accordingly, I find the company does not have to reduce the customer's charges further.
16. I note the customer's comments that she is expected to contact the company if there is an issue with the pumping station. However, the evidence shows that whilst the company appreciates the efforts to inform them, the company already has alarms that alert it to such issues, so this would be unnecessary. Accordingly, I find no failings by the company in this regard.

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17. The company has certain obligations in respect of its customer services. From the evidence provided, such as the timeline set out in the company's response, I am satisfied that by the end of the company's dialogue with the customer, the company had adequately explained the reasons behind why a meter could not be installed without a further internal survey, the Assessed Household Charge and how it is applied.
18. However, I note there were failings concerning the company not responding to the customer after requesting a further metering survey in August 2021. It was not until December 2020 that the company took further action as requested by the customer. On careful review of all the evidence and taking account of the length of time that this dispute has been ongoing, I am satisfied that this failure falls within Tier 1 of the WATRS Guide to Compensation for Inconvenience and Distress. Accordingly, I direct the company to pay the customer £20.00 for this aspect of her claim. I consider that £20.00 would adequately cover the customer for the inconvenience caused by the company's failings.
19. The customer has made comments on the preliminary decision concerning contacting the company about issues with the pumping station. Having carefully considered each aspect of the customer's comments I find that they do not change my findings, which remain unaltered from the preliminary decision.
20. Considering the above, I find the evidence does not prove the company failed to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person concerning installing a water meter and its charges. However, I am satisfied there have been failings concerning customer service, for which the customer has not been adequately compensated.

Outcome

The company shall pay the customer the sum of £20.00.

What happens next?

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- This adjudication decision is final and cannot be appealed or amended.
- The customer must reply by 23 November 2021 to accept or reject this decision.
- If you choose to accept this decision, the company will have to do what I have directed within 20 working days of the date on which WATRS notifies the company that you have accepted my decision. If the company does not do what I have directed within this time limit, you should let WATRS know.
- If you choose to reject this decision, WATRS will close the case and the company will not have to do what I have directed.
- If you do not tell WATRS that you accept or reject the decision, this will be taken to be a rejection of the decision. WATRS will therefore close the case and the company will not have to do what I have directed.



Mark Ledger FCI Arb
Adjudicator

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