

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X626

Date of Final Decision: 25 October 2021

Party Details

Customer:

Company:

Complaint

The customer claims that the company failed to recognise and correctly allocate various payments to her account, which has led to inconvenience and distress. The customer is seeking the company to apologise and pay £10,000.00 for inconvenience and distress caused.

Response

The company says the customer's payments were not missing, and they had been offset against her account correctly. However, the company admits that there was some confusion due to the customer's first bill being generated by the company's new billing platform. The company has made a £35.00 goodwill gesture in recognition of its failures in this regard. The company has not made any further 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 the alleged missing payments. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings regarding customer service for which the customer has not already been adequately compensated.

Outcome

The company needs to take no further action.

The customer must reply by 22 November 2021 to accept or reject this decision

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ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X626

Date of Final Decision: 25 October 2021

Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The company failed to recognise and correctly allocated various payments to her account, all of which has led to inconvenience and distress.
- The customer is seeking the company to apologise and pay £10,000.00 for inconvenience and distress caused.

The company's response is that:

- The customer's payments were not missing, and they had been offset against her account correctly.
- However, the company admits that there was some confusion due to the customer's first bill being generated by the company's new billing platform.
- The company has made a £35.00 goodwill gesture in recognition of its failures in this regard.
- The company has not made any further offers of settlement.

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.

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

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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 failed to recognise and correctly allocated various payments to the customer's account.
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. On 20 April 2020, the company sent the customer her annual bill for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. The bill included a payment schedule and advised the customer that a PayPoint payment card would be sent to make payments. On 30 April 2020, the company received a cheque from the customer for £34.07 and then on 19 May 2020, an amount of £33.98 via a PayPoint payment card.
5. On 3 June 2020, the customer was migrated to the company's new billing system. The evidence shows that further payments were made and correctly allocated to the customer's account on the new billing system.
6. On 18 February 2021, the company sent the customer her annual bill for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. On 26 February 2021, the customer contacted the company to query her account balance. The company's customer service representative could not locate the payments of 30 April 2020, 19 May 2020 and requested the customer provide evidence of the payments.
7. Between 26 February and 29 March 2021, various discussions took place between the parties resulting in the company informing the customer that no payments were missing and all payments had been correctly allocated against the customer's account. The initial error that caused the payments not to appear on the 18 February 2021 bill was due to the two payments received before

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migrating her account to the new billing platform. I understand that the company made a goodwill payment of £35.00 and adjusted the customer's payment plan to reflect the credit applied.

8. I understand that the customer continued to question how the payments were missed and remained dissatisfied with how the company had handled her complaint. In July 2021, she progressed her complaint to CCWater to resolve. I understand that a CGS payment of £20.00 was made to the customer's account during this for the delay in responding to a query by the customer.
9. The evidence shows that during the company's dialogue with CCWater, it was explained again that the customer's payments were not showing on the bill of 18 February 2021 because they had been received before migrating the customer's account to the company's new billing system. The customer remained unhappy and, on 5 September 2021, commenced the WATRS adjudication process.
10. As to whether the company should pay compensation of £10,000.00 for failing to recognise and correctly allocated the payments to the customer's account, on a careful review of the schedule of payment and the various correspondence put forward by the company, I can find no evidence that the customer's payments were missed or not correctly allocated. The evidence shows that the payments were not showing on the customer's bill of 18 February 2021 because they had been received before migrating her account to the company's new billing system, when a new account number was generated for her. However, despite not showing on the February 2021 bill, the payments were still correctly allocated to the customer's account. It seems that the company's new billing system would only create bills based on the information in the new billing system. Therefore, the payments received before the customer's account migration would never show on the customer's future bills. Accordingly, 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 missed payments.
11. The company has certain obligations in respect of its customer services. As evidenced by the timeline within the company's defence documents, I am satisfied that by the end of the company's dialogue with the customer, the company had adequately explained that the payments had been received and allocated correctly to the customer's account. This is shown by the correspondence put forward by the customer and company as evidence.

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12. However, I note there were failings concerning the company neglecting to check the customer's original account on its legacy billing system, which would have cleared up the confusion. However, on examining the various correspondence, I believe that once the company became aware of its mistakes, it dealt with the customer's concerns efficiently and appropriately, considering the circumstances. The company has made a CGS payment of £20.00 and a further £35.00 goodwill payment to cover these failings. Accordingly, I am satisfied that there have been no failings concerning customer service, which the customer has not already been adequately compensated for.
13. Both the company and customer have made minor comments on the preliminary decision. Having carefully considered each aspect of the customer's and company's comments I find that they do not change my findings, which remain unaltered from the preliminary decision.
14. 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 the alleged missing payments. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings concerning customer service for which the customer has not already been adequately compensated.

Outcome

The company needs to take no further action.

What happens next?

- This adjudication decision is final and cannot be appealed or amended.
- The customer must reply by 22 November 2021 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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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ML' followed by a long horizontal line.

**Mark Ledger FCI Arb
Adjudicator**

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