

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X830

Date of Final Decision: 14 March 2022

Party Details

Customer: CUSTOMER

Company: COMPANY

Complaint

The customer claims that the company refuses to issue monthly statements showing the breakdown of his charges. The customer is seeking the company to apologise and reduce his outstanding balance to £150.00 to be affordable.

Response

The customer's charges have been raised in accordance with the volume of water used and based on meter readings. The company bills its customers every six months, and the company does not have the facility to produce monthly bills. The bill the customer has advised was produced monthly in 2020 was, in fact, his opening bill when his water account was opened. However, the customer has been advised that he can set up a payment plan which spreads the costs over monthly payments and has been placed on the company Social Tariff to help with future bills. The company has not made any further offers of settlement.

Findings

I am satisfied that the evidence shows that the company did not fail to provide the customer's services to the standard reasonably expected concerning its charges.

Outcome

The company needs to take no further action.

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The customer has until 11 April 2022 to accept or reject this decision.

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ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION

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Date of Final Decision: 14 March 2022

Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The company refuses to issue monthly statements showing the breakdown of his charges.
- The customer is seeking the company to apologise and reduce his outstanding balance to £150.00 to be affordable.

The company's response is that:

- The customer's charges have been raised in accordance with the volume of water used and based on meter readings.
- The company bills its customers every six months, and the company does not have the facility to produce monthly bills.
- The bill the customer has advised was produced monthly in 2020 was, in fact, his opening bill when his water account was opened.
- However, the customer has been advised that he can set up a payment plan which spreads the costs over monthly payments and has been placed on the company Social Tariff to help with future bills.

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 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.

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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 should issue monthly statements showing the breakdown of his 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 the OFWAT Guaranteed Standards Scheme and its own Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS).
4. From the evidence put forward by the customer and the company, I understand that on 23 September 2020, the customer contacted the company to advise that he had moved and agreed on a cash payment plan of £32.00 per month.
5. On 21 January 2021, the customer contacted the company to query his balance and when his next water bill was due. I understand that he was advised that the next bill would be in March and that as he was on benefits, he was eligible for the company's Social Tariff. However, the evidence shows that the customer did not currently wish to apply for the Social Tariff.
6. On 5 February 2021, the customer contacted the company as he was worried he had not received a bill in months and was concerned about the balance. The company advised the customer that he is billed every September and March, and therefore, he was not due a bill until March.
7. In October 2021, the company made various attempts to contact the customer regarding the balance on his account. Once contact was established with the customer, various discussions took place regarding the frequency of the company's bills and the outstanding balance. I understand that the company requested details of the customer's Universal Credit amount to calculate his income for its available tariffs. The customer was informed that the company could set up an affordable payment plan going forwards for him. I note that the company cancelled this due to non-payment of the previous payment plan, and a PAYG account statement was sent to the customer.

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8. Between 3 November and 21 December 2021, various correspondence took place between the company and the customer concerning the company's various Social Tariffs, the frequency of the company's bills and the customer's outstanding balance. The result of these discussions was that the customer was placed on a Social Tariff, was offered the option to pay monthly and advised that the company would not issue monthly bills.
9. The customer was unhappy with the company's position and progressed matters to CCWater, which resulted in the company placing a temporary hold on the customer's water account until 25 February 2022 to allow the customer more time to set up an affordable payment plan. On 31 January 2022, the customer was still of the view that he was being unfairly treated by the company by the company not issuing monthly bills and commenced the WATRS adjudication process.
10. As to whether the company should issue monthly statements showing the breakdown of his charges, the evidence shows that currently the customer is currently billed every six months in September and March for his water usage. As his property has a water meter installed, the company reads his meter, and his water bills are produced based on the readings taken. The evidence shows that the company has repeatedly advised that despite a bill being produced on a six-monthly basis, the customer can set up an affordable payment plan which is paid monthly and is based upon his expected consumption.
11. In my view, if the company were to bill monthly, then it would likely need to produce some bills on estimated readings, otherwise there would have to be an increase in meter readings. As the evidence shows, if the company issued a monthly bill, it would require frequent meter readings to avoid estimated bills, which would drive up the associated costs of meter reading upon the company's wider customer base. Within its response, the company says that a monthly bill is not a practical scenario and would be permitted by OFWAT. However, a payment plan does take account of the actual consumption recorded at that property, is adjusted considering subsequent readings, and is typically paid upon an agreed monthly basis.
12. I note the customer's comments that the company has previously billed on a monthly basis, however, after careful review of the evidence, I find that I agree with the company's position that the document in question is in fact his opening bill when the customer water account was opened.
13. The evidence shows that the company has offered the customer a payment plan and has also placed the customer its Social Tariff, which caps on his freshwater charges and applies a 25% discount on his sewerage charges. On careful analysis of all the evidence, I find that the customer

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has been provided with a reasonable solution for the company not to issue monthly bills. Considering the above, I find that it has not been proven that the company failed to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person concerning its charges or the frequency of its bills. Accordingly, this aspect of the customer's claim does not succeed.

14. The company has certain obligations in respect of its customer services. As evidenced by the timeline within the company's response documents, I am satisfied that by the end of the company's dialogue with the customer, the company had adequately justified the reasons behind why it was unable to offer monthly billing. Accordingly, I am satisfied there have been no failings concerning customer service.
15. The customer has made minor comments on the preliminary decision. 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.
16. Considering the above, I find the evidence has not proven the company failed to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person concerning its charges, nor has it shown the company failed to provide services to the standard to be reasonably expected when investigating these issues. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings regarding customer service.

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 11 April 2022 to accept or reject this decision.

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- 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



Mark Ledger FCI Arb
Adjudicator

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