

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X021

Date of Final Decision: 31 July 2022

Party Details

Customer:

Company:

Complaint

The customer has received a bill for £13,000.00, but she lives alone and cannot have used such a large amount of water. However, the company says the charges are correct and payable and offered her a leakage allowance of just £900.00. The customer wants the service she has received from the company to be reviewed and, as the bill cannot be accurate, she wants the company to bill her correctly.

Response

The large balance on the customer's account has built-up over time due to the customer's non-payment and a spike in consumption. However, investigations have found no evidence of a leak or a fault on the meter, and the customer's consumption has now returned to normal. Despite this, the company offered the customer an allowance of £948.62, but the customer rejected the offer. As the customer's bill is correct and payable, the company denies liability to reduce it.

Findings

The evidence does not show that the company has failed to provide its service to the standard reasonably expected by the average person by billing the customer incorrectly, and I find no other failings on the company's behalf. In view of this, I cannot direct the company to reduce the customer's charges.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

This document is private and confidential. It must not be disclosed to any person or organisation not directly involved in the adjudication unless this is necessary in order to enforce the decision.

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X021

Date of Final Decision: 31 July 2022

Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- She has received a very large bill of approximately £13,000.00 from the company. She complained many times but the company could not find her meter until recently and, when it did, it said her usage was normal.
- The company offered her an allowance of £900.00, but has refused to reduce her bill any further.
- She referred her complaint to CCW and the company said that it has billed her accurately, but her consumption has now dropped and it does not know why.
- This has been going on for five years and has caused her to suffer depression and financial hardship as the company referred her account to a debt collection agency.
- She does not accept that she has used the amount of water she is being charged for and would like WATRS to review her complaint, review the customer service provided to her by the company, and direct the company to amend her bill so she is charged correctly.

The company's response is that:

- Since 2015, the customer has only paid approximately £250.00 for her water services. Therefore, the balance on the customer's account has built-up over a number of years and is correct and payable.
- It obtained two county court judgements for non-payment of bills before 2018, and attempted to contact the customer to discuss her consumption and overdue account balance on numerous occasions via text, telephone and letter from 1 October 2020 through to 29 October 2021, but the customer did not respond. On 1 November 2021, the customer called to set up a payment plan.
- Meter readings from the correct meter have always been taken and the bills that have been raised correctly reflect the recorded usage.
- The water consumption at the property spiked during the period from 30 May 2018 to 23 November 2021 and it took appropriate action to make the customer aware of the increased

This document is private and confidential. It must not be disclosed to any person or organisation not directly involved in the adjudication unless this is necessary in order to enforce the decision.

usage during that time. However, a reading taken on 25 January 2022 showed that the customer's usage had returned to a normal level and, in view of this, it is confident that the meter is working correctly. Investigations have shown that there is no evidence of any previous or current leaks.

- On 1 March 2022, it offered the customer a one-off allowance of £948.62 as no reason had been identified for the spike in consumption other than the water having been consumed.
- The two CCJs cannot be removed from the customer's credit file as the correct process was followed due to the customer failing to pay her bills.
- It understands that the customer is dissatisfied with the service she has received, but it does not accept that the level of service it has provided has fallen below the expected standard.
- As the bill is correct and payable, it cannot reduce the customer's charges.

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 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 does not accept that she has used the amount of water she has been billed for and wants the company to reduce her bill to reflect her actual usage. The company states that the customer's bill is high for two reasons; firstly, she has only paid approximately £250.00 for water since 2015, and, secondly, there was a period of unexplained high consumption between

This document is private and confidential. It must not be disclosed to any person or organisation not directly involved in the adjudication unless this is necessary in order to enforce the decision.

May 2018 and November 2021 that increased the customer's charges considerably. The company states that it attempted to contact the customer about the high consumption on many occasions, but was unable to reach her, and the charges are correct and payable as there is no evidence of a leak or a fault on the meter.

2. As the adjudicator of this dispute, I can only direct the company to reduce the customer's charges if the evidence shows, on the balance of probabilities, that the company has failed to provide its service to the standard reasonably expected by the average customer by charging the customer for water lost through an external leak, a faulty meter or a shared supply, or where the customer's charges have increased due to some other failing on the company's behalf.
3. Having reviewed all the evidence presented by the parties, including the table of meter readings in the company's pre-investigation response dated 12 April 2022, I find no evidence to show that the customer's high consumption was caused by a faulty meter, a shared supply or a leak. This is because there is no suggestion that the supply is shared, or a leak has been repaired, or the meter has been changed, so any meter fault, shared supply or unrepaired leak would still be causing high meter readings, yet the readings have returned to normal.
4. In view of this, and because there is no evidence to show that incorrect charges have been applied to the customer's account due to some other failing on the company's part, I cannot find that the company has failed to provide its service to the standard reasonably expected by the average person by billing the customer for the water consumption recorded on her meter.
5. I appreciate that the customer will be extremely disappointed by my decision but, as I have found no failing on the company's part, and find that the charges on the customer's account are most likely correct and payable, I cannot direct the company to reduce the customer's charges; therefore, the customer's claim cannot succeed.
6. The customer has also asked for the level of service provided by the company to be reviewed, and has explained that the situation has caused her depression and financial hardship. I understand that the large bill and the company's debt collection action will have caused the customer a great deal of worry. However, having considered the timeline provided by the company in its response to the customer's claim, I find that the company took appropriate action to inform the customer about her high consumption, investigated the cause of the customer's

This document is private and confidential. It must not be disclosed to any person or organisation not directly involved in the adjudication unless this is necessary in order to enforce the decision.

high consumption, and complied with its debt collection procedure correctly at all times. I note that the company failed to respond to the customer in a timely manner on a couple of occasions; however, I also note that the company provided the appropriate CGS payments to the customer for these failings. In view of the above, I do not find that the company has failed to provide its service to the standard reasonably expected by the average customer and I make no direction to the company in this regard.

7. Following the preliminary decision, the customer made some further comments and explained that although she accepts that the charge built-up over time, she cannot accept they are correct. I have reviewed the evidence again but find nothing to demonstrate on the balance of probabilities that the charges are incorrect and, therefore, my decision remains unchanged.

Outcome

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 by 14 August 2022 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.

K S Wilks

Katharine Wilks

Adjudicator

This document is private and confidential. It must not be disclosed to any person or organisation not directly involved in the adjudication unless this is necessary in order to enforce the decision.