

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X121

Date of Final Decision: 20 September 2022

Party Details

Customer:

Company:

Complaint

The customer claims the company based its charges from when she moved into the property on a meter which did not serve her property. Furthermore, the company's refund of £319.46 was insufficient for the difference in meter readings. The customer is seeking the company to apologise, refund the £2,630.47 paid for her water charges on the incorrect meter, pay interest on the refunded charges and pay compensation of £2,000.00 for the loss of time, inconvenience and distress incurred.

Response

The company says the customer is not paying for another person's water usage or for any other property other than her own. The meter serial number input into the company's billing system when the meter was installed on the property was incorrect. This incorrect serial number did not relate to another property or an incorrect meter. Furthermore, as the readings for the customer's property were primarily estimated, the wrong serial number is not relevant for billing purposes. The company provided the customer with detailed calculations on its charges and bill adjustments from when the customer occupied the property. The company has not made any offers of settlement.

Findings

I am satisfied the evidence shows the company did not fail to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected concerning the customer's charges. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings concerning customer service, for which the customer has not already been offered adequate compensation.

Outcome

The company needs to take no further action.

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

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Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The company based its charges from when she moved into the property on a meter which did not serve her property.
- Furthermore, the company's refund of £319.46 was insufficient for the difference in meter readings.
- The customer is seeking the company to refund the £2,630.47 paid for her water charges on the incorrect meter, pay interest on the refunded charges and pay compensation of £2,000.00 for the inconvenience and distress incurred.

The company's response is that:

- The customer is not paying for another person's water usage or for any other property other than her own.
- The meter serial number entered into the company's billing system when the meter was installed within the property was incorrect. This incorrect serial number did not relate to another property or to an incorrect meter.
- Furthermore, as the readings for the customer's property were primarily estimated, the incorrect serial number is not relevant for billing purposes.
- The company provided the customer with detailed calculations on its charges and bill adjustments from when the customer occupied the property resulting in a credit on the account, which has been refunded.

How is a WATRS decision reached?

In reaching my decision, I have considered two key issues. These are:

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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.

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 customer was adequately compensated after finding that her meter serial number differed from that on her bills.
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 has certain obligations regarding its customer services as set out in the OFWAT Guaranteed Standards Scheme and the company's 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 in 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 company, I understand that the customer moved into her property on 5 January 2000 and has since had an active account with the company. On 24 August 2021, the customer contacted the company to query her bill and estimated readings. The company arranged an appointment for 15 September 2021 to visit the customer's property.

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6. On 15 September 2021, the company attended the customer's property and established that the meter had a serial number of REDACTED, whilst on the company's billing system, the serial number was marked as REDACTED *. Following further investigations, it was established that the meter's serial number had been mistyped at the point of installation. This was why the customer's bills showed a serial number of 1T00331* rather than the correct one of REDACTED. On 23 September 2021, the company amended the serial number on the customer account to reflect the valid serial number.
7. The company agreed to recalculate the customer charges as previously it was necessary to use estimated bills as it had not been able to gain access to the customer's property to obtain readings from the internal meter.
8. On 14 April 2022, after confirmation that the correct serial number had been entered into the account and exactly when the customer had moved into the property, the company recalculated the customer's charges to 5 January 2000, this being the customer's occupation date, and advised the customer that he had been over-charged £287.40.
9. The evidence shows that the sum of £287.40 was derived by taking the average bill difference from 09 September 2006 to 10 February 2010 of £26.28 and multiplying by 6.6 years, providing an adjustment sum for the period of 05 January 2000 to 08 September 2006 of £173.43. This figure was added to the bill adjustment for 09 September 2006 to 27 January 2022 of £113.97, which totals £287.40.
10. The evidence shows that the sum of £287.40, plus a further £32.06, was refunded to the customer on completing all its calculations. The customer remained unhappy with the company's refund of £319.46 and, on 28 April 2022, commenced the WATRS adjudication process.
11. Regarding the customer's comments regarding the meter and the confusion concerning the meter's serial number. On reviewing the various evidence, I am persuaded that the meter serving the customer property is the meter with serial number REDACTED. The evidence shows that the customer's meter is internal and does not serve another property. Furthermore, I find that I am satisfied that the reason for the difference in the serial number on the customer bill was most likely

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due to human error when the meter was first installed. I find that the company was correct in refunding the customer the sum of £319.46.

12. However, I find that the error did not affect the customer charges, as for most of the customer's occupancy, the customer was charged on an estimated reading due to the company being unable to access the property. I note that the company has adjusted the customer's account to the occupation date.
13. Bearing this in mind and the fact that due to the refund, the customer has suffered no loss being billed on an estimated reading, I find that the company has not failed to provide its services to the standard one would reasonably expect regarding billing.
14. 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 the reasons behind its calculation of the customer's refund. Furthermore, reviewing the various correspondence, I find that the company dealt with the customer's concerns efficiently and appropriately, considering the circumstances.
15. I note the customer's comments that the company delayed its investigation into the customer's meter issue, which led to inconvenience and distress. However, on reviewing all the evidence provided, I am persuaded that the company dealt with the customer's concerns promptly, efficiently and appropriately, considering the circumstances.
16. Concerning the customer's loss of time dealing with the complaint, I find no sums are due. Whilst I appreciate the customer's position, the customer has not provided any evidence to support the sums requested and accordingly, I find that this aspect of the customer's claim fails.
17. In light of 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 the customer's charges. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings concerning customer service, for which the customer has not already been offered adequate compensation, as the company has provided a good level of service throughout its dialogue with the customer.

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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 October 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.



Mark Ledger FCI Arb
Adjudicator

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