

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /0728

Date of Decision: 1 May 2018

Complaint

The customer received a high water bill. When she contacted the company about this an engineer visited and found that she was being billed on the wrong meter since she first took occupation of the property. It took numerous emails to have the mistake corrected. The company has provided a token gesture of £30.00 for a poor telephone call but refuses to correspond with her further. The customer complains of the poor customer journey.

Defence

The property was built in 2010/11 and an account was set up in the developer's name with meter serial number 10M[.]. The developer did not advise that the serial number was incorrect. The customer had no complaint until 6 December 2017. After visiting, the company found that the customer was being billed on the wrong meter. It corrected the customer's bill, leaving an outstanding balance. It acknowledges poor customer service on one call and provided a goodwill payment for this.

The company has not made any offer of settlement to the customer.

The developer was the party that installed the meter and provided details of this to the company. The company had no reason to suspect that the customer's property was linked to an incorrect meter until it visited on 2 January 2018. It resolved the customer's billing immediately. The company did not fall below the standard to be reasonably expected aside from one telephone call for which it has paid reasonable compensation.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

The customer must reply by 31 May 2018 to accept or reject this decision.

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 DECISION

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /0728

Date of Decision: 1 May 2018

Party Details

Customer: []

Company:[].

Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The customer moved into her property in 2011 and contacted the company to register this. She provided a meter reading with details of the meter which the customer's landlord had provided to her. The customer's bills remained steady until an unusually high bill was received in December 2017. The customer queried this and the company sent an engineer who found she was being billed on the wrong meter. The customer journey was poor with numerous emails to the company before it corrected the mistake. The company has provided £30.00 in acknowledgement of a poor telephone call. The customer is unhappy with the outcome of her complaint and is not reassured that the adjustment to her account is correct.
- The customer requests the company admit fault and take ownership of her complaint, provide a formal apology, and £5000.00 in compensation.

The company's response is that:

- The customer's property was built in 2010/11. Before the customer moved in, the developer set up an account with the meter serial number 10M[] for Plot 1, known as [] after completion. The developer did not advise that the meter serial number was incorrect at any time. The customer advised that she had moved into the property on 12 August 2011 and provided the meter serial number. No concerns were raised about billing until 5 December 2017. An engineer attended and found that the incorrect, neighbouring water meter was assigned to the customer's account. The correct water meter serial number is 10M[]. The customer's meter read

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.

00214 and the customer's bill was recalculated using the correct reading from the previous bill that had been based on a reading of 00195. The company has provided a goodwill payment of £30.00 for a telephone call in which an agent spoke over the customer. The customer's outstanding balance is £163.82.

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.

If the evidence provided by the parties does not prove both of these issues, the company will not be directed to do anything.

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 is the resident of the property []. This property was built in 2010/11 and the customer moved in in August 2011. The customer contacted the company and an account was set up in her name for the water meter 10M[], believed to serve [].
2. I am mindful that the developer of a large housing development, such as this one in which the customer's property was Plot 1, will usually be the party responsible for ensuring that all essential services are installed to each property. The company will not be directly involved in installing water and sewerage to the development and each individual property. In this case, it is clear that the customer's property was built as part of a development and that the developer installed the water supply to the property and assigned the water meters to each address.
3. I am satisfied from the evidence provided that the developer of the customer's property wrongly noted the water meter reference number when it installed the services. The company was advised

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.

that the meter number ending 209 was allocated to the customer's property and had no way to determine that this was an error without visiting the property and reviewing the setup of each property and meter. I am satisfied that, until the customer complained of a high bill, the company had no reason to visit the property other than to read the meters. I therefore find that the company was not aware and had no reason to be aware that the customer's address was linked to the wrong water meter.

4. The customer contacted the company in relation to a high bill on 6 December 2017. As a high bill can indicate a leak on the supply, the company sent an engineer to visit her on 2 January 2018. The company visited on this date and found that the customer's property was actually served by meter with the reference number 10M[]203. A meter reading was taken of 00214.
5. I am satisfied that the company was not responsible for the incorrect meter being assigned to the customer's account. I also find that this issue was rectified at the earliest opportunity, the company not having had any prior reason to suspect that an error may have been made.
6. The company has provided a list of all meter readings for both the incorrect meter ending -209 and the correct meter ending -203. Both meters were read on 3 April 2017: the incorrect meter read 195; the correct meter read 174. The customer was billed against the actual meter reading of 195.
7. After identifying that the reading from the incorrect meter had been used, the company removed the charges applied for readings after the 3 April 2017 reading. It then recalculated the customer's bill based on the actual reading on 2 January 2018 of 214. This provided actual usage of 19 cubic metres of water.
8. I am satisfied that the company has properly recalculated the customer's bill to correct the error. The incorrect meter was recording greater water usage than the correct meter, however they were largely consistent until the 5 October 2017 reading. I accept that it was reasonable to recalculate the customer's bill based on the previous meter reading as the customer's actual use had since exceeded this figure. I find that the recalculation of the customer's bill based on the usage between the incorrect meter reading on 3 April 2017 of 195 and the correct meter reading on 2 January 2018 of 214 has fully corrected the customer's billing. I am satisfied that the balance on the customer's account is correct and due.

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.

9. The customer has requested that the company admit fault and take ownership of the issue. As above, I have found that the company played no part in the installation of the meters and placed a reasonable reliance on the info provided to it by the developer. There was no reason for the company to suspect that an error with the meter assignment had been made by the developer. I also find that it resolved the issue promptly once it was identified on 2 January 2018. In her comments, the customer has referred to the meter number not being updated; however the 13 February 2018 bill included within the Consumer Council for Water documentations shows the correct meter number. I am therefore satisfied that the company has resolved the developer's error once it was identified and accordingly I make no award in respect of this request.
10. The customer has requested an apology, referring to the error with the meter numbers and the time taken to be correctly billed after the mistake had been identified. The customer has also referred to the number of calls that it took to have an engineer sent to look at the meter.
11. I note that the customer called the company in respect of the high bill on 6 December 2017. The company advised that it would contact her within 10 working days and did so, booking an appointment on 18 December 2017 for the visit on 2 January 2018. I am satisfied that this part of the customer's complaint was handled appropriately with the company meeting its advised timescales.
12. I am satisfied that the company had amended the customer's account and corrected the billing by 12 January 2018, providing a bill based on the usage between the last-used incorrect reading and the correct reading taken on 2 January 2018. I am not persuaded that there was any undue delay in the generation of the corrected bill, or that the company fell below the standard anticipated from a reasonable water supplier in how it handled the billing amendment.
13. In respect of the customer service received generally, the customer complained about the agent on the call of 11 January 2018. The company has apologised for the level of service on this call and provided a payment of £30.00 to the customer. I am not persuaded that there was any other instance of poor customer service.
14. In view of my findings above, I am not persuaded that the company is required to provide any additional apology to the customer.

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.

15. Finally, the customer has requested £5000.00 in compensation for “loss of interest”, distress, inconvenience, and the time spent dealing with the issue. As above, the decision has found that the company was not responsible for the mix-up with the meter numbers and that it resolved this immediately once the issue was identified. It could not have become aware of the issue at an earlier time. The customer’s billing has been corrected and I am not persuaded that the meter error has materially disadvantaged her. The company has also handled the customer’s complaint appropriately and promptly throughout. I am not persuaded that the customer has been caused any distress or inconvenience as a result of the company’s actions, aside from the 11 January 2018 call for which the customer has already received appropriate compensation. I therefore find no basis for the customer to receive any further sum of compensation.

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 31 May 2018 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.



Alison Dablin, LLM, MSc, MCI Arb

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.



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.

www.WATRS.org | info@watsr.org