

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /1002

Date of Decision: 13 November 2018

Complaint

The customer received a high bill in March 2017. He was offered an allowance towards the high bill and the unexplained high consumption. However, the company subsequently refused to grant this. The customer requests an allowance towards the March 2017 bill.

Defence

The company states that it investigated the customer's high bill. Its technicians believed a faulty sprinkler system may be the cause, and the customer had planted trees that required daily watering. The meter stopped turning when the inside stop tap was closed, indicating an issue within the customer's property. When the meter was removed for testing, it was found to be under-recording water use. The company acknowledges some failures in its customer service, and it has applied credits to the customer's account for these.

Findings

The customer's water meter was under-recording water use and the high bill therefore did not relate to a fault with the water meter. The customer advised the company that a plumber had checked the internal plumbing and found no fault; however, no evidence was sent to the company or provided as evidence to WATRS. The water use could reasonably be explained by a faulty sprinkler system combined with daily watering of plants. The evidence demonstrated, to the balance of probabilities, that the bill could be explained by the customer's actual use and that no leak allowance was due.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

The customer must reply by 11 December 2018 to accept or reject this decision.

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Date of Decision: 13 November 2018

Party Details

Customer: []

Company: [].

Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The customer received a high bill in March 2017, covering the period September 2016 to March 2017 in the sum of £1,154.91. The customer contacted the company about this and was told that they would consider a one-off allowance towards the high bill and unexplained high consumption. The company then declined to grant this.
- The customer requests the allowance towards the March 2017 bill.

The company's response is that:

- The company states that the customer's bill for March 2017 was £1,154.91, with the meter reading of 1510 cubic metres. The customer called the company to query this and the company visited to take a new meter reading. On 2 May 2017, the meter reading was taken at 1551 cubic metres. The company visited the property at the customer's request on 16 June 2017. The technician advised that there may have been a fault on the customer's garden sprinkler system. The company visited again on 4 July 2017 and found that, when the internal stop valve was turned off, the meter stopped moving, suggesting an internal issue. The technician also reported that there were new plants and trees at the property that required watering every day. The company offered to test the meter, however the customer was unhappy that there would be a charge if no fault was found. The company advised that it had calculated an allowance of around £370.00 on 28 July 2017 but that this was dependent on the allowance being approved. The allowance was declined on 4 August 2017. The company then agreed to test the meter free of

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charge. The meter was removed on 23 October 2017 and the test was returned on 30 November 2017. The test found that the meter had been under recording. The company has provided the customer with goodwill payments for customer service failures. The company has not received any report from the customer's plumber to confirm that there was no issue with the customer's plumbing. The company denies that the customer is entitled to an allowance towards the high bill.

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 received a high bill in March 2017 for £1,154.91. The customer disputes that this bill is accurate and requests an allowance in respect of it.
2. I consider that, where the high usage is unexplained, it may be appropriate for the company to apply an allowance for this, akin to a leakage allowance. It is therefore first necessary to determine whether the use recorded on the customer's water meter was, on the balance of probabilities, accurate and if there is any explanation for this usage.

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3. I note that the customer's water meter has been removed and tested independently. I have been provided with the Certificate of Calibration for the customer's water meter. The test found that the meter was not recording any volume of water where the flow rate was less than around 10 litres per hour. At the fastest flow rates, the meter was recording around 30% less water than had actually passed through it. I am satisfied from this document that the customer's water meter had a fault, but that, as it was under-recording the customer's usage, this benefitted the customer.
4. I am mindful that unexpected high water use will commonly relate to a leak on a customer's pipework. I note that the site visit on 16 June 2017 found no leak on the supply pipe and then tested the inside stop valve. The notes state that the technician found that there was "movement on the [meter] with no visible usage". The technician felt that this was possibly a fault on the external garden sprinkler system. The customer advised that he would contact a plumber.
5. I note that, on 20 June 2017, the customer spoke with the company and stated that he had had a plumber out to investigate and that the plumber had "found absolutely no issues". The company requested a copy of the plumber's report. I note that the company has not received any plumber's report and none has been provided as evidence in the customer's Water Redress Scheme application.
6. I also note that, during a later site visit, the company's representatives found that the customer had planted new trees at the property, requiring watering every day.
7. Having reviewed the evidence, I am satisfied that there was no leak on the customer's supply pipe between the outside stop tap and the inside stop tap, after the pipe entered the customer's property. I am satisfied that the high usage can be explained by a possibly-faulty sprinkler system and daily watering of newly planted trees and plants. In the absence of a plumbing report demonstrating that there was no issue with the sprinkler system or elsewhere, or that the water use could not be attributed to this and watering plants, I am not persuaded that the customer has demonstrated that he is entitled to a leak allowance.
8. I note that the company has provided goodwill credits to the customer's account for poor customer service issues. However, I am satisfied that these issues do not form part of the customer's claim to the Water Redress Scheme as no remedy has been requested in relation to the customer service received.

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9. In view of the above, I am satisfied that the usage recorded by the customer's water meter reflects actual usage and does not warrant a leak allowance. The customer's claim is therefore unable to succeed.

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 11 December 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

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