

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /1044

Date of Decision: 19 November 2018

Complaint

The customer's bills have been high and the customer states that he saw the water meter moving when no water was being used. The customer submits that the water meter was not accurately recording his usage. The customer requests that the company further investigate the reason for high water consumption, and provide him with an apology and £500.00 in compensation.

Defence

The company attended the customer's property and tested the meter, but no fault was found. The company replaced the meter and the water use recorded remained consistent. An internal water meter was fitted and the use recorded on this meter was consistent with the use recorded on the external meter. The company did incorrectly bill the customer with an external meter reading. It has recalculated the customer's bills and provided goodwill payments for customer service failings. It denies the customer's claim.

Findings

The company was not able to witness the meter continuing to turn when water was not being used. It nevertheless replaced the meter and fitted an internal meter. All use recorded has been consistent between the meters indicating no leak or sharing of the customer's supply. On the balance of probabilities, the meter was recording the customer's actual use. There was no reason for the company to conduct further investigations; any issue within the customer's property is for the customer to investigate and resolve. The compensation payments were proportionate to the customer service failures and the company had provided an appropriate apology.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

The customer must reply by 17 December 2018 to accept or reject this decision.

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ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION

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Date of Decision: 19 November 2018

Party Details

Customer: []

Company: [].

Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The customer submits that he has been billed incorrectly for his water supply in December 2017. The customer saw the water meter dials moving when no water was being used. He submits that the meter was not accurately recording his water consumption. The company has investigated, replaced the external water meter and fitted an internal water meter, however the volume of water recorded remains high for the number of people living at the property. The cause of this is unknown.
- The customer requests the company attend and further investigate the reasons for the high consumption being recorded on the meter, that he is given an apology for the customer service received, and that the company provide him with £500.00 in compensation.

The company's response is that:

- The company states that the customer contacted it in December 2017 as he thought that there was a leak on the supply. The company attended on 15 January 2018 and there was no movement on the meter and no fault was found. The water meter was changed on 17 January 2018 and a calibration certificate from time of manufacture in October 2017 was provided to the customer in March 2018. The level of water use was not significantly different from that recorded on the old meter. Tests in February 2018 found no leaks. The company installed a meter internally in March 2018 to compare the use recorded on the external and internal meters. The comparison showed that they were recording consistent consumption. It also evidenced that the

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external meter serves only the customer's property and this was confirmed by the customer's own checks. Although there was no evidence of a leak, the company revised the customer's charges in June 2018, reflecting the average use for the number of people in the property from 17 June 2016 to 17 January 2018. This resulted in a reduction of charges of £160.22. There has been confusion with meter readings whilst two meters are in situ, with the external meter being erroneously used to bill the customer's account in June 2018. The company has apologised for this and credited the customer's account with £100.00. The company submits that the water consumption recorded fluctuates, however the occupancy level has varied and there is nothing untoward in the pattern of use. It submits that the goodwill credits applied to the customer's account, totalling £399.63, adequately recognise any customer service failures.

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 submits that the high water consumption being recorded on his water meter is unexplained, and he requests the company further investigate this.

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2. The evidence shows that the company has taken various steps to try and identify if there is any leak on the customer's supply, or if this was being shared with any other property.
3. I acknowledge the customer's submission that the water meter continued to turn when water was not being used in the property. I am mindful that the company has not been able to witness the meter continuing to turn, despite attending the property and conducting tests.
4. The company replaced the customer's external water meter with a new one, providing the calibration certificate to the customer. It then fitted an internal water meter. I am mindful that this would demonstrate if there was any leak on the customer's supply pipe between the external water meter and the point at which the pipe entered the customer's property. It would also show if there was any neighbouring supply that was spurred off from the supply pipe after the customer's external water meter.
5. The company has provided the meter readings from the original external meter, the replacement external meter, and the internal meter. I note that the original external meter recorded an average daily use of between 0.28 cubic metres and 0.55 cubic meters, an average of 0.41 cubic meters. The use fluctuates; this is consistent with a changing number of occupants and varying time being spent at the property.
6. The new external meter readings record an average daily use of between 0.28 cubic metres and 0.50 cubic metres. The use also fluctuates. The internal meter also recorded an average daily use of between 0.28 and 0.50 cubic metres.
7. The new external meter and the internal meter were both in situ at the same time, with meter readings being taken on the same dates. I note that the difference in the daily use recorded between the new external and the internal meters was a maximum of 0.02 cubic metres. I am satisfied from this that there was no leak to the customer's supply pipe before it entered the customer's property, and that the customer's supply does not serve any other property.
8. I am satisfied that the evidence from the water meters indicates that the water use recorded relates solely to water that has entered the customer's property. I find no evidence of any fault with any water meter, nor of any leak to the pipework. On the balance of probabilities, the use recorded on the water meter is accurate and reflects actual water use within the customer's property.

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9. In view of the above, I find no basis for the company to conduct any further investigations. In the event there is a plumbing issue within the customer's property that is causing additional use, this would be a matter for the customer to investigate and rectify.
10. I note that, notwithstanding that no issue was found with the water meter and no leak was identified, the company agreed to recalculate the customer's bill between 17 June 2016 and 17 January 2018, the date on which the external water meter was replaced. The bill was recalculated with no use between 17 June 2016 and 14 July 2016, the average daily use for one occupant between 1 July 2016 and 2 September 2016, and the average daily use from the customer's meter readings between 3 September 2016 and 17 January 2018. This resulted in a bill reduction of £160.22. I am therefore satisfied that, although no leak was found, the customer has not suffered any loss as a result of any discrepancy with the original external meter.
11. I find that there have been a number of customer service failings, including the company billing the customer from the external meter reading following the installation of the internal meter. However, I note that the company provided the customer with a £100.00 goodwill payment in respect of this failure. The company has provided other credits totalling £299.63 for other customer service failures.
12. I am mindful that the decision has found that there was no evidence of any issue with the customer's water meter and that, on the balance of probabilities, the customer's bills reflected actual use. I am satisfied that the company has properly investigated the customer's claim that the meter continued to turn when no water was being used, installing an internal meter to confirm if there was a problem when the company was unable to witness the meter continuing to turn. I am satisfied that the company's goodwill payments are proportionate to its customer service failures. I acknowledge that the customer has spent some considerable time complaining to the company, however as no fault has been found with the meters or the supply, I am not persuaded that any compensation is due for the stress and inconvenience relating to the customer's complaint. As above, the compensation provided by the company is proportionate to its customer service failures. I also note that it arranged for the external meter to be removed to ensure that the billing error could not be repeated. I am therefore not persuaded that the customer is entitled to any further sum of compensation.

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13. Finally, the customer has requested an apology. I note that the company has provided a written apology to the customer in its letter dated 31 October 2018. As above, I am not persuaded that there has been any fault with the customer's supply and the billed charges, other than when it incorrectly used the external meter reading to calculate a bill. I find that the company's apology is appropriate for the customer service failures for which the customer has already received compensation. I am therefore not persuaded that any further apology is due from the company.

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 17 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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