

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /0910

Date of Decision: 02 August 2018

Complaint

The customer states that the main water meter for her property is placed in a location that makes it difficult to read, and that the company has not responded adequately to her request that it be relocated. She requests that the company send someone to her property to help resolve the matter.

Defence

The company states that it is willing to relocate the customer's water meter, but that the customer must first undertake work on her private pipes at her own expense. It has also moved the customer to its Check Meter Read service so that her meters are read remotely on a monthly basis, with these readings being provided to the customer.

Findings

I find that the company has acted reasonably in its responses to the customer's complaint, and has provided its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

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

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ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /0910

Date of Decision: 02 August 2018

Party Details

Customer: []

Company: []

Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- She has two water meters at her property.
- One meter is placed in the ground, and is too low to read easily.
- Because of historic issues with billing, she needs to be able to read the meters and keep track of use, but is increasingly unable to do this.
- The company has been unwilling to offer a solution or move the meter.
- She is unable to have an internal meter installed due to the location of the pipework.
- She would like the company to send someone to her property to help resolve the matter.

The company's response is that:

- The property has two water meters. The main water meter that records water usage inside the building is located in the ground in the garden, while a second meter that records external use of water is mounted on an external wall of the building.
- The company is willing to relocate the main water meter, but cannot do so until changes have been made to the customer's private pipes.
- The customer has previously objected that a company employee climbed over a gate to access the property, but the company determined to its satisfaction that this was not the case.
- The customer was previously billed twice for standing water because she had two water meters. The company acknowledged this was incorrect, and refunded payments made for the second charge.

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- The company has met with the customer to discuss relocating her meter. It has explained that this is only possible if the customer undertakes certain work on her private water pipes at her own expense. The customer has declined to undertake this work.
- The company offered to enrol the customer in its Check Meter Read service, which would allow readings to be taken remotely, thereby eliminating the need for the customer to read the meters herself. The customer declined this offer.
- As the customer did not wish to receive estimated bills, the company excluded the customer from estimated billing.
- The customer contacted the company in October 2017 as she had not received a bill. The company determined that the delay resulted because the customer had been excluded from estimated billing, and so she did not receive an estimated bill at this time. Due to staffing issues a number of properties in the customer's area had not had their meter read.
- The customer explained to the company that she had not asked for her meter to be excluded from estimated billing. The company apologised, and made a goodwill payment to the customer of £50.00.
- The customer's account was no longer excluded from estimated billing, and a company staff member agreed to monitor the customer's account.
- The customer contacted the company about the issue again in January 2018, and was again offered the Check Meter Read service, but this was again declined.
- A company representative met with the customer again in March 2018 to examine the issue, but reached the same conclusion as previously.
- The company believes it has provided good customer service to the customer, and has offered the Check Meter Read service to the customer as a resolution.
- The Check Meter Read service was offered to the customer again on 22 May 2018 and was accepted.

The customer comments on the company's response that:

- She feels her issue is a broadly applicable one for elder customers.
- She believes it is possible to fit a wall mounted meter outside.
- While she was initially offered "remote" meter reading, this was not successful, resulting in the need to read the meter herself.
- Bills are generated randomly by the company and are estimated. This requires that she knows the correct reading, so that she can notify the company.

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- She currently has two water meters due to an error by the company in the original installation.
- She is happy to receive estimated bills providing she can read the meter herself and convey correct readings to the company.
- The Check Meter Read service is not working properly. Her last bill was received at an interval that was not a quarter.
- Given the problems she has experienced, she would still like to be able to read her water meter.
- She objects to only having two days in which to submit her comments on the company's defence.
- Due to the short time-frame for her comments she has been unable to consult with her plumber.

The company responded to the customer's comments. Under the Water Redress Scheme Rules, such comments will only be accepted at the discretion of the adjudicator. However, as I find the company's comments to be responsive to the customer's concerns, and of assistance in resolving this dispute, I will accept them. The company comments that:

- The customer's water meters can be read remotely. As the customer is now part of the Check Meter Read service, reading will take place monthly, and the customer will be provided with these readings.
- The customer's account is being checked weekly by a member of the company's staff to ensure there are no billing issues.
- The delayed bill about which the customer objects was delayed by extreme weather.

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.

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How was this decision reached?

1. The customer has had ongoing concerns about the accuracy of her billing, and so wishes to be able to read her main water meter to verify the bills that she receives. Due to the location of this meter, it is physically difficult for her to read.
2. The company has agreed to relocate the customer's main water meter, but has stated that it cannot do so unless the customer undertakes work on her private water pipes at her own expense.
3. While the customer disagrees that it is necessary for this work to be undertaken, she has provided no support for this position. The customer mentions discussing the matter with her plumber, but has provided no statement from her plumber giving an expert opinion that the meter could be relocated without the work being done that is requested by the company.
4. While I do not question that the customer has discussed the matter with her plumber, as she states, the Water Redress Scheme Rules require that I base my decision on evidence actually submitted. As a result, in the absence of any supporting evidence that the customer's plumber shares her view that the meter could be relocated without the work being done that is requested by the company, I must accept the view of the company's expert over the non-expert view of the customer.
5. As a result, on the balance of the evidence available to me, I find that the company has properly considered the customer's request to relocate the main water meter at her property, and has reasonably offered to do so, but that the customer has not undertaken the work required for the relocation to be possible.
6. Were the customer to procure an expert opinion that the meter relocation could be undertaken without the work being required by the customer, this could be submitted to the company for reconsideration of its position.

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7. In addition, I acknowledge that the company has not only proposed a method for the relocation of the customer's water meter, but has agreed to enroll the customer in a service under which the customer's meters would be read monthly, with this reading being provided to the customer.
8. While I recognise that the customer is hesitant to rely on the company taking its own readings, without being able to verify them herself, I find that this is a reasonable accommodation by the company, as it would provide a means for the customer to regularly monitor her reported water usage, thereby providing her with an ability to ensure consistency each month, and to object if she felt a particular month's reading was unreasonable.
9. Although I appreciate this solution does not fully meet the customer's desires, I find that it is a reasonable alternative, and that in providing this option the company is providing its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person.
10. The customer also objects to only being given two days in which to comment on the company's defence.
11. I acknowledge that this is a short period for review of a company's defence and submission of comments, however this is the period expressly stated in Rule 5.4.3 of the Water Redress Scheme Rules. As a result, this is not a time limit that as an adjudicator I have the power to adjust. Whether allowing customers more time to submit their comments on the company's defence would result in more considered submissions, and thereby enhance the WATRS adjudication process, is a decision that must be undertaken when the Water Redress Scheme Rules are next revised.
12. For the reasons give above, I find that the company has provided its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person. Consequently, I do not award the customer the redress requested.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

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What happens next?

- This adjudication decision is final and cannot be appealed or amended.
 - The customer must reply by 31 August 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.
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Tony Cole

Tony Cole FCI Arb

Adjudicator

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