

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT/ /1380

Date of Decision: 12 June 2019

Complaint

The customer's claim is that, due to his age and medical condition, he is a vulnerable customer and the company has refused to relocate his external meter to inside his property so he can physically read the meter, currently the meter is situated externally and within a shallow pit. The customer is seeking for the company to relocate the external meter and install it inside his property or alternatively raise the meter towards ground level so it can be physically read.

Defence

The company submits it is not possible to raise the meter at its current location and that to move the meter to inside the customer's property would mean the company would not be able to detect any leaks on the customer's external supply and its technicians would also be denied access to the meter. Furthermore, the customer is currently neither registered disabled or a sensitive customer, therefore it is not under an obligation to move the meter from its current location. However, it has offered the customer solutions to the issue of him not being able to physically read the meter, which it feels are reasonable. 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 by the average person with regard to relocating the customer's water meter. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings with regard to customer service as the company has provided a good level of service throughout its dialogue with the customer.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

- The customer must reply by 10 July 2019 to accept or reject this decision.

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any alleged failings. Therefore, the company submits it is not liable for any further damages in this respect.

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 the company has failed to provide its services to the standard one would reasonably expect and 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 dispute centres on whether the company should relocate its external meter to inside the customer's property. Within its defence, the company has provided OFWAT's guidance on Water Meters and pointed out the relevant sections of its Metering Policy.
2. The evidence shows the customer's water meter was fitted in November 2016 as part of the company's progressive metering programme. In March 2017, the customer's two-year comparison journey started, and he was then sent bills comparing his current Rateable Value charges to what his charges would be based on his meter readings. The company states the customer's charges are due to be switched to the meter imminently, as his two-year comparison period ended in April 2019.
3. From the evidence put forward by the parties, I understand that on 11 October 2018, the customer contacted the company requesting his meter be moved to a location where he could

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read it. Furthermore, he had employed a private plumber to alter his pipe work to ensure a meter could be fitted internally. The same day, the company advised it would not move the meter inside the property as it would not be able to detect any leaks on the customer's external supply pipe and it would also mean that if for any reason the remote reading wasn't possible it would need to access the customer's property in order to obtain a reading. Between 18 October 2018 and 16 November 2018, various correspondence took place between the parties, resting with the company stating it would not be able to move the meter from its current location and advising the customer that he could either use the internet to view his meter reading or use the company's meter reading service at no extra cost.

4. With regard to the customer's comments the meter should be installed internally. The customer states he is aged 71 and has dysplasia of the spine, which makes him a vulnerable customer, therefore, the company should relocate his meter to enable him to physically read it. Page 24 of OFWAT's guidance states that water companies are expected to move the meter to a location where it can be accessed more easily or provide a meter reading service at no additional cost if the customer has special needs due to age, illness or disability.
5. The company's Code of Practice and its Metering Policy state that if a customer is disabled or sensitive customer the meter may be moved to a different location so it can be accessed more easily. However, in this instance the customer is not registered as disabled or defined as a sensitive customer. As shown by the company's website a sensitive customer does not automatically include an elderly customer and applies to commercial rather than residential customers. The company states it will not relocate the meter internally as the customer is neither disabled or a sensitive customer, it would not be able to detect any leaks on the customer's external supply pipe and it would also mean that if for any reason the remote reading wasn't possible it would need to access the customer's property in order to obtain a reading. However, in line with OFWAT's guidance the company has offered that if the customer is unable to access his meter reading via the internet the company will provide a free meter reading service. In addition to this the company states the customer has the option to fit a private water meter inside his property which the customer could use to monitor his usage. However, the company would continue to use the external meter for billing purposes, so in my view, installing a private meter offers little above the free meter reading service and the ability to view the reading via the internet. Whilst I appreciate the customer's position, I am satisfied the company's view regarding not moving the meter internally is reasonable considering the circumstances. Therefore, I find there are no grounds to conclude the company has failed to provide its services to the customer

to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person with regard to moving the meter to inside the customer's property.

6. With regard to whether the external meter should be raised within its current position so the customer can physically read the meter. I understand from the evidence put forward by the parties the meter's current location is in a pit outside the property. From analysis of the photographs supplied by the company, the meter is shown in a relatively shallow pit. However, I accept the customer's comments that due to his dysplasia of the spine condition he has difficulty to getting down to read the meter at its current location. The company states that raising the meter can only be done before the box is installed, and in this instance, it cannot raise this meter inside as it is inside the box. Furthermore, raising a meter involves installing four 90 degree bends in the piping and it tries to avoid this if at all possible, as the bends can impact the customer's flow rate. The company will only raise supplies if absolutely necessary, such as when the supply is too deep to fit in the box. In this instance that is not the case. In addition to this the company states as it is a smart meter, and the customer has access to the internet, he is able to view his readings online and therefore there is no need for the customer to physically read the meter. As above, I note the company's offer that if the customer is unable to access his meter readings via the internet, the company will provide a free meter reading service. In light of the above, I am satisfied the company has not failed to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person with regard to raising the meter to enable it to be easier to read.
7. 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 why it is unable to relocate the customer's water meter.
8. In light of the above, I find the customer has not proven the company failed to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person with regard to relocating the customer's water meter. Furthermore, I am satisfied there have been no failings with regard to customer service as the company has provided a good level of service throughout its dialogue with the customer.

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 10 July 2019 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 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**