

## SPSO decision report



**Case:** 201903477, Wave  
**Sector:** Water  
**Subject:** incorrect billing  
**Decision:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C owned a holiday let property and received water and waste services from Wave. C said they were paying approximately £200 per quarter for the waste and water services to the property. Months after commencing services with Wave, C received new, backdated bills increasing the amount by over £4000 for the period which C considered was incorrect. After investigations and amendments some charges were removed, however, C remained of the view that the increased charges and demands being received for the same were incorrect and submitted a complaint.

We found that there was a significant delay in a meter reading for the property being actioned. This meter reading showed usage more than six times over the anticipated amount, but bills were not issued showing this increased usage until some months later. On investigation it appeared that the most likely cause for the increased usage was a leak, however, C was not advised about the possibility of applying for a leak allowance until after the six-week period for submitting a claim had passed. This was unreasonable and we upheld this aspect of the complaint.

We also found that the communication relating to this complaint was poor. Wave did not make clear their position on C's dispute with the charges and on their complaint until months after the complaint was submitted. Then it was predominately follow-up contact from C which prompted Wave to respond to their queries. C's complaint was not finalised nor was C referred to our office until twelve months after they submitted their complaint. This was an unreasonable delay and, therefore, we upheld this aspect of the complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the communication failings and billing delays. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets](http://www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets).
- Revise C's charges to align with what C would have paid if they had been awarded a leak allowance.
- Review the bills issued to C to ensure they are accurate. If any changes are required a cover letter should be provided explaining the changes.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- Have a process in place to respond to actual meter readings and notifying customers of the updated bills in a timely manner, possibly including a cover letter if there is a significant change and what steps they can take to dispute the usage.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- A clear process in place to escalate complaints/disputes, ensuring Wave makes their position clear and

customers are aware of how they can escalate their complaint.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.