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1.0 Billing

1.1

C contacted the supplier regarding a previous debt being taken every time C made a payment on their electricity prepayment card. C believed this had already been cleared, and after checking with the supplier, this was also suggested by the agents. C then received a number of assurances regarding the refund to be received, but this never arrived. When a complaint was received by the Ombudsman, this was reviewed by the supplier. It then established that C had received incorrect advice from its agents regarding the final payment needed to make and a subsequent refund.

It was concluded that C had received poor customer service when contacting the supplier for advice, and that their expectations had been unrealistically raised as a result. This also resulted in a number of avoidable call charges being incurred. Therefore, in resolution the supplier was required to send a letter of apology, make a goodwill credit to the account, provide a full breakdown of the credit balance on the account, and ensure a refund was now sent.

1.2

C complained to the supplier after it adjusted their account in consideration of a meter problem. The supplier explained that the problems had been caused by central meter registration errors, leading to C's meter being recorded as imperial when it was in fact metric. When the supplier adjusted the recorded meter information this led to a large bill being produced. C remained unhappy and requested a transfer to another supplier.

After reviewing this matter it was unclear who was to blame for the incorrectly recorded information. However, it was concluded that avoidable delays had been involved and that C had failed to receive an acceptable level of customer service.

The supplier was required to send a letter of apology, provide a full written breakdown of all charges/payments and credits on the account, contact C to establish if they would like to set up another postponed payment plan by Direct Debit or transfer to an alternative gas supplier without penalty. The supplier was also required to make a further goodwill credit to the account in full consideration of all information.

1.3

The Supplier failed to issue a final bill and refund on the account to the correct address in a timely manner. Despite C's actions of chasing the Supplier for the refund it failed to identify its error, and resolve the complaint. The Ombudsman concludes the Supplier failed to provide an adequate level of customer service and administration of the account.

In summary the Ombudsman requires the supplier to make a further goodwill gesture in recognition of the customer service issues raised, the inconvenience and costs incurred; and to issue a formal letter of apology. The Ombudsman recommends that the Supplier reviews any training issues and shortfalls in its customer service procedures that C's complaint has highlighted.

1.4

C moved property and contacted the supplier to request a refund of an overpayment. C highlighted that incorrect readings had been used when closing the electricity account, in addition to the supplier failing to account for some Direct Debit payments. This was acknowledged by the supplier, although it failed to take the necessary action to resolve this matter.

It was concluded that there had been avoidable delays with the supplier's recalculation. At the time of the investigation the Supplier had already made the refund, in addition to provide a goodwill payment in respect of C's telephone expenses. However, it was concluded that a further goodwill credit should be made in respect of the poor customer service received. The supplier was required to send a letter of apology and provide written confirmation that the account had been closed with a nil balance.

1.5

C requested a refund of the credit balance on the account. The Supplier issued refund cheques, but C maintained the cheques had not been received. C contacted the Supplier several times and was told the cheques would be reissued. However, C did not receive them.

The Supplier confirmed the refund cheques had been cashed and could not, therefore, be reissued. It was considered that C had been misadvised about the re-issue of the cheques and that this had unnecessarily delayed resolution of the complaint. The Supplier was required to apply a small credit as a gesture of goodwill and send an apology. It was recommended that C obtained a crime reference number regarding the cashed refund cheques. On receipt of the crime reference number, the Supplier was required to investigate the matter in a timely manner, inform C of the outcome of the investigation and re-send the cheques, if appropriate.

5.0 Billing - Inaccurate Invoices

5.1

C received a final bill which included a penalty charge. C disputed the fee and refused to pay. The supplier continued to send payment demands for the fee and passed the account to a debt collection agency. C called the Supplier and wrote several times, but did not receive a response.

The supplier confirmed C agreed to a tariff change, which included a penalty fee should C transfer to a new supplier. It was unable to demonstrate C had been informed of the penalty fee, or that C had been charged at a discounted rate for fuel usage. The Supplier's failure to address C's complaint was considered to be reflective of a shortfall in customer service. It was required to send a letter of apology, apply a credit equal to the penalty fee and confirm C's account had been closed with a zero balance. It was also required to confirm C had been charged at the discounted rate, provide a refund of any overpayments C had made and provide a small payment as a goodwill gesture in consideration of the costs C had incurred trying to resolve the complaint.

5.2

C complained that the supplier had incorrectly charged them. It later transpired that the supplier had used incorrect meter details: C's bills were therefore incorrect. C complained but got no response for several months. However, the supplier had by then conducted a review of the account, corrected the details, provided a new bill and offered a goodwill payment.

The Ombudsman considered the delay in the response to C represented poor customer service, but the other measures it had taken were appropriate. The supplier was requested to consider a payment plan for the arrears but if it was not to be offered, the supplier should confirm its decision in writing to C.

6.0 Billing - Inaccurate Meter Reading

6.1

C transferred to a new supplier and provided the previous supplier with a final meter reading. The Supplier did not accept the reading as it was not in line with a reading sent to it by C's new supplier. C disputed the meter reading used, but the Supplier did not take any action to query the reading with C's new provider. C continued to complain and it was agreed the meter reading C had provided would be used. However, the Supplier did not update its records or send a final bill.

It was noted the Supplier had now issued a final bill and refunded the credit balance on the account. However, its failure to raise a dispute regarding the final reading, or update its records, was considered to be reflective of unsatisfactory customer care. It was required to make a small payment as a gesture of goodwill in consideration of the customer service issues identified and the costs C had incurred trying to resolve the complaint.

6.2

C notified the supplier of a house move. The supplier sent a final bill, which C considered to be high. C disputed the charges and the supplier identified that the incorrect MPRN had been registered for C. The supplier agreed to credit the balance on the final bill, but failed to do so, and C received demands for payment from a debt collection agency. C sent letters of complaint and phoned the supplier, it agreed to arrange for someone to visit the building in which C's previous and current flats were located, to check the details of all gas and electricity meters. However, it did not do this and the issue remained unresolved.

The Ombudsman considered the supplier's failure to credit C's final bill, investigate and resolve the confusion with the meter serial numbers or respond to the issues raised by C to be reflective of a shortfall in customer service. It was required to arrange a visit to ensure the meter serial numbers were registered against the correct flats within the building, confirm in writing to C that the gas account from the previous flat had been closed with a zero balance and that C's credit rating had not been affected. It was also required to make a payment as a gesture of goodwill, establish C's average usage and provide a refund of any overpayments C had made and contact C to discuss an appropriate electricity tariff.

6.3

C provided the supplier with an accurate meter reading and received a very high bill. C contacted the supplier. C's meter was checked and it maintained the charges were correct and that the large bill was due to the fact C's bills for the previous two years had been based on estimated readings. C continued to dispute the charges and remained unhappy with the supplier's response.

The Ombudsman was satisfied the supplier taken reasonable steps to obtain a meter reading, but that C had not provided one. It was considered C was responsible for payment of the charges. However, the supplier's failure to fully explain the charges to C, or actively seek to resolve C's queries was considered to be reflective of a shortfall in customer service. It was required to send a letter of apology, explain its calculations to C, check the accuracy of the meter and recalculate the charges if the meter was found to be faulty and provide C with the opportunity to arrange a payment plan.

13.0 Billing - Payment Method

13.1

A supplier reduced C's monthly DD payments. C queried this, as C did not consider the payments would cover usage, based on previous bills, but the supplier confirmed the reduction was correct. C had planned to buy a new boiler, but given the suppliers decision to reduce the DD payments, considered it was no longer necessary. Some months later, the supplier notified C that DD payments were to be increased. C complained and believed the supplier had provided misinformation. C was no longer able to afford to change the boiler and considered that he supplier should provide

compensation as C's decision not to install a new boiler had been based on its advice that monthly payments would be reduced.

The Ombudsman noted that the supplier had reduced C's monthly DD payments, even though price rises were planned for electricity and considered its decision to amend the DD to be reflective of a shortfall in customer care. It was acknowledged that the supplier may have influenced C's decision not to change the boiler, but the Ombudsman did not consider that the supplier could be held responsible for this, or the fact C had now spent the money borrowed to install a new heating system. The supplier's offer of a credit as a gesture of goodwill was considered to be reasonable and it was required to maintain the offer.

14.0 Billing - Quality of Customer Service

14.1

C complained that the supplier failed to take payments and then billed them for a large amount for the full arrears. C complained and the supplier investigated. It found the account for C had been registered incorrectly. It states the error was corrected and a reduction was offered. C complained that as this was the supplier's error they should have the entire arrears amount waived.

The Ombudsman considered this was not justified, as C could have spotted the error themselves sooner. The offer from the supplier was considered generous and C was recommended to accept it along with a payment plan.

25.0 Transfer - Incorrect Action Taken

25.1

C complained that the supplier closed an account without permission, citing a request from a new supplier. C complained that the request had not been made, but the supplier failed to respond. C sought the assistance of energywatch, but the supplier failed to respond to energywatch either. The supplier later reviewed C's account and stated it had received a transfer request but that a change of address had been completed in error. It stated it was correcting C's account, reinstating itself as C's supplier.

The Ombudsman considered C had experienced poor customer service and that on the balance of probabilities, the transfer had been initiated in error. The supplier was required to make an apology for the errors and poor customer service and provide a goodwill payment. It was also required to confirm the account had been fully transferred back for C.

26.0 Transfer - Incorrect Billing

26.1

C transferred to the Supplier. When C moved out of the property, C's previous supplier sent a final statement for the account and it was established C's new Supplier had taken over the wrong supply when C transferred to it. C requested a refund of the payments made for the incorrect supply, but the Supplier did not take any action, continued to send bills and passed the account to a debt collection agency.

The Supplier confirmed it should have raised an Erroneous Transfer Request when C first contacted it. The Supplier's failure to do this, or respond to C's complaint was considered to be reflective of a shortfall in customer service. It was noted the Supplier had now issued a refund to C and arranged for C to transfer back to the previous supplier. However, the Supplier was required to send a letter of apology, confirm the account had been closed with a nil balance and that C's credit rating had not been affected and provide a response to additional queries raised by C. It was also required to make a small payment as a gesture of goodwill.