



CASE STUDY

MRS E

This is a clear case of a vulnerable customer being subjected to the very lowest standards of customer service. Another person in the same situation could easily have been pressured into paying these outrageous demands and never been any the wiser.

Mrs E has lived in the same council property on the outskirts of Bradford for the past 25 years. She is in her late 70s, has suffered a stroke, which has left her with limited mobility, she is also hard of hearing. In spite of these difficulties Mrs E is still very mentally able and although she lives alone, she enjoys the support of her family, who live near by.

The Problem

Mrs E pays for her gas and electricity through a pre-payment meter. She has always been very conscientious, paying a certain set amount each two weeks at the post office and as a result she is always in credit for both fuels; interestingly, she always keeps the receipts for her top-ups and has meticulous records going back several years.

Around seven years ago her electricity supplier, changed her electricity meter to a more modern one. The supply was uninterrupted and no problems became apparent until Mrs E noticed that she hadn't received her Annual Electricity Statement. When she called to question this, the company representative she spoke to told her not to worry. Several years went by following the same pattern: no Annual Statement followed by reassurances from her supplier that everything was OK.

In the summer of 2017 Mrs E received an invoice from her supplier for over £700 and then shortly after another bill for an amended amount of over £800. On calling to question the bill and to explain that she was a PAYG customer and as such couldn't possibly have debt, she was told that the debt was from the standing charge (an amount the utility companies charge every day regardless of usage – usually around 20p).

Mrs E was understandably upset and so asked her younger sister, Mrs H, to talk to her supplier on her behalf. After several phone calls and many hours on hold, Mrs H was able to find out that when the new meter had been installed it hadn't been registered on the system properly. As a result of this oversight the payments Mrs E had been making for the past seven years hadn't found their way to her supplier. The supplier was unwilling to either cancel the debt or to correct their mistake and make sure the meter was properly logged.

Action Taken

The Green Doctor made a complaint on behalf of Mrs E. In raising the complaint we made it very clear that we were more than willing to take the case to the Energy Ombudsman if it wasn't resolved to our satisfaction within the statutory 58-day period.

2 Weeks later an investigator from the supplier emailed Mrs H asking what we would need to consider the case resolved. I advised Mrs H to demand the following:

- Debt removed and monetary compensation of not less than £250.
- A written apology.
- A written explanation of how the problem arose in the first place.
- A written explanation of the measures that will now be taken in order to remedy the situation.

Outcome

All of the above demands were met