We're here to help

Sorting your complaints about electricity, gas and water.

Our service is free, independent, and fair.

UTILITIES DISPUTES
TAUTOHETOHE WHAIPAINGA

0800 22 33 40 | udl.co.nz

About Utilities Disputes

Utilities Disputes sorts your complaints about electricity and gas. We can also sort your complaints about water, broadband installation (shared property) and telco complaints (for Contact customers).*

We are independent and fair and here to help.

We listen, we ask the right questions and we don't take sides.

People contact us with issues or complaints about bills, customer service, meters, disconnection, and supply.

Our service is free, fair and independent – just like an Ombudsman.

If you have an issue or complaint, you need to let your provider know straight away. We can help you with this and put it in written format – a written complaint summary that helps you and your provider understand the issue.

If it's not sorted, you can contact us at Utilities Disputes.

* *Utilities Disputes can consider water complaints for those organisations that are a member of our Water Complaints Scheme, we can also look into telco complaints with consumers who have Contact as an energy provider.*

Our services

Our services are:

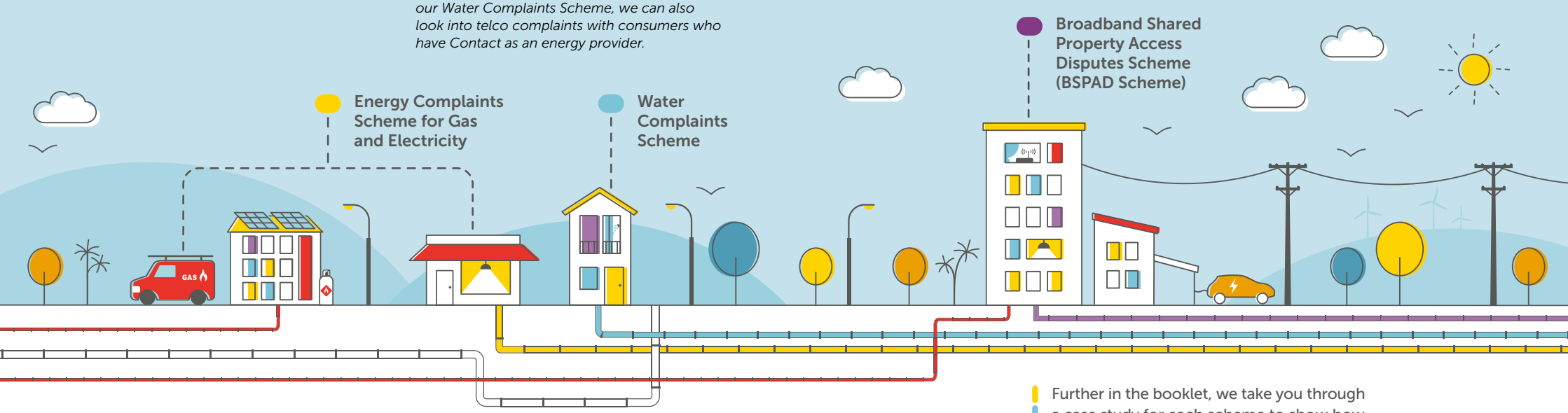
- Accessible
- Free to consumers
- Effective as we sort your complaints
- Fair – so you will be treated in a fair way by Utilities Disputes
- Independent – like an Ombudsman
- Expert – which means we sort your complaints and concerns
- Helpful

Contact us:

Email
info@udl.co.nz

Phone
0800 22 33 40

Website and live chat
udl.co.nz



Further in the booklet, we take you through a case study for each scheme to show how we were able to help get a complaint resolved.

How we work

Utilities Disputes works with you (the consumer) on your complaint.

When you have a complaint about an electricity, gas, water or telco provider, please contact your provider first to talk about it. You can still talk to us.

Step 1

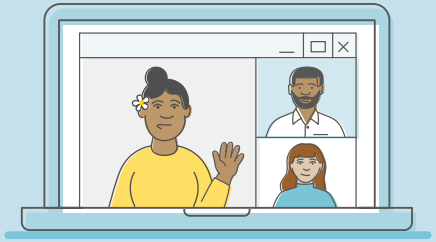
Contact your provider and explain your concerns and say what you think is fair to resolve the complaint.

Step 2

You may be able to contact your provider by phone, by email through their website with Live Chat or a Contact us form.

Step 3

If you do not want to contact your provider directly, you can ask Utilities Disputes to raise or refer your complaint to your provider for you – we are here to help. We can provide you with a written complaint summary that helps you and your provider.



Utilities Disputes also works with your provider to sort your complaint.

You can expect your provider to:

- let you know it has received your complaint (if you complained in writing)
- look into your complaint
- respond to you.

Your provider has a fixed time to resolve the complaint with you (usually 20 working days which means Monday to Friday). If your provider needs more time and gives you a good reason in writing, the provider may take more time (usually up to 40 working days).

During this time, providers should not:

- disconnect your services, or
- take credit action (take money from you) on amounts you dispute while the complaint is investigated. You should keep paying your current bills and any undisputed bills.

Our complaints process

Initial contact

Phone, email, web complaint, in person, live chat, social media or letter

This is a brief overview of the process. Go to **udl.co.nz** to find out more

We can help you raise your complaint with your provider

Your provider has 20 working days to try and sort your complaint

Complaint sorted

Complaint not sorted

4,536 complaint summaries written to help you raise your complaint and support a provider's understanding of your complaint

Utilities Disputes tries to resolve complaint

We work with you and your provider to sort it

Complaint sorted

Complaint not sorted

13,500+ complaints looked into with **90%** sorted in 10 days or less

We can investigate any issues and talk with you and your provider to resolve the complaint

We gather more information about your complaint and recommend a solution

Complaint sorted

Complaint not sorted

Most of the formal complaints we investigate are resolved at this stage

Commissioner's decision

If your complaint is still not sorted, our Commissioner can issue a written decision that your provider must follow, if you accept it

Accept

Not accept

If you decide not to accept the Commissioner's decision, you can take your complaint to the Disputes Tribunal, or another forum

Sorting your electricity, gas and water complaints

We can help by looking into most complaints about an electricity or gas provider*:

- checking your provider has billed you accurately for your energy use by asking to look at your meter readings, bills, account notes, and payments
- writing a complaint summary that may help you raise a complaint and supports your provider's understanding of your complaint. This may include explaining why we believe your bill is correct, if we cannot find anything wrong.

What we cannot do

We cannot look into a complaint about the price your provider charges you for electricity or gas. What we can do is look into whether your provider has given you good information about the price you have been charged and if your bills are correct.

Disconnections

A disconnection is when your provider may disconnect your energy supply for unpaid bills.

- Your provider may disconnect your energy supply for unpaid bills if it gives you notice.
- Your provider may charge you fees for disconnection and reconnection.

Your energy supply can stop for other reasons such as safety or an outage on the network. If your power is off, check with your provider.

** We can look into water complaints with providers who are members of Utilities Disputes' scheme. We can also look into complaints on broadband installation (shared property) and telco complaints (Contact with bundled services).*

Common electricity, gas and water issues

Higher bill than usual

1 Using more energy than usual because:

- the weather is colder or hotter than usual

  For example, in summer, you may have been watering the garden more often or showering more often or using a water blaster or leaving on outside hoses or sprinklers by mistake.

  For example, in winter you may run more hot baths than usual.
- more people are at home using energy
- friends or family have been visiting
- you have added or replaced an appliance that may use core electricity, gas or water
- an appliance is faulty – check your water heater
- you may have used your washing machine or dishwasher more often
- you have moved house – the size location and insulation of your house affects how you use energy
- leaks or faulty appliances (hot water cylinders).

2 Your bill includes other charges:

- unpaid amounts from previous bills
- fees such as disconnections, reconnection fees or late payment bills
- if you are late in paying your bills you might lose discounts or be charged extra fees.

3 You were undercharged on previous bills because:

- your provider under estimated your bills
- your provider incorrectly read the meter
- the meter was faulty.

4 The meter reading is incorrect

Check if your meter reading is correct. Compare meter numbers and readings with your bill. Are the readings similar? If not talk with your provider.

Catch-up bills

A back bill or catch-up bill, is for energy you have used but was not included in past bills.

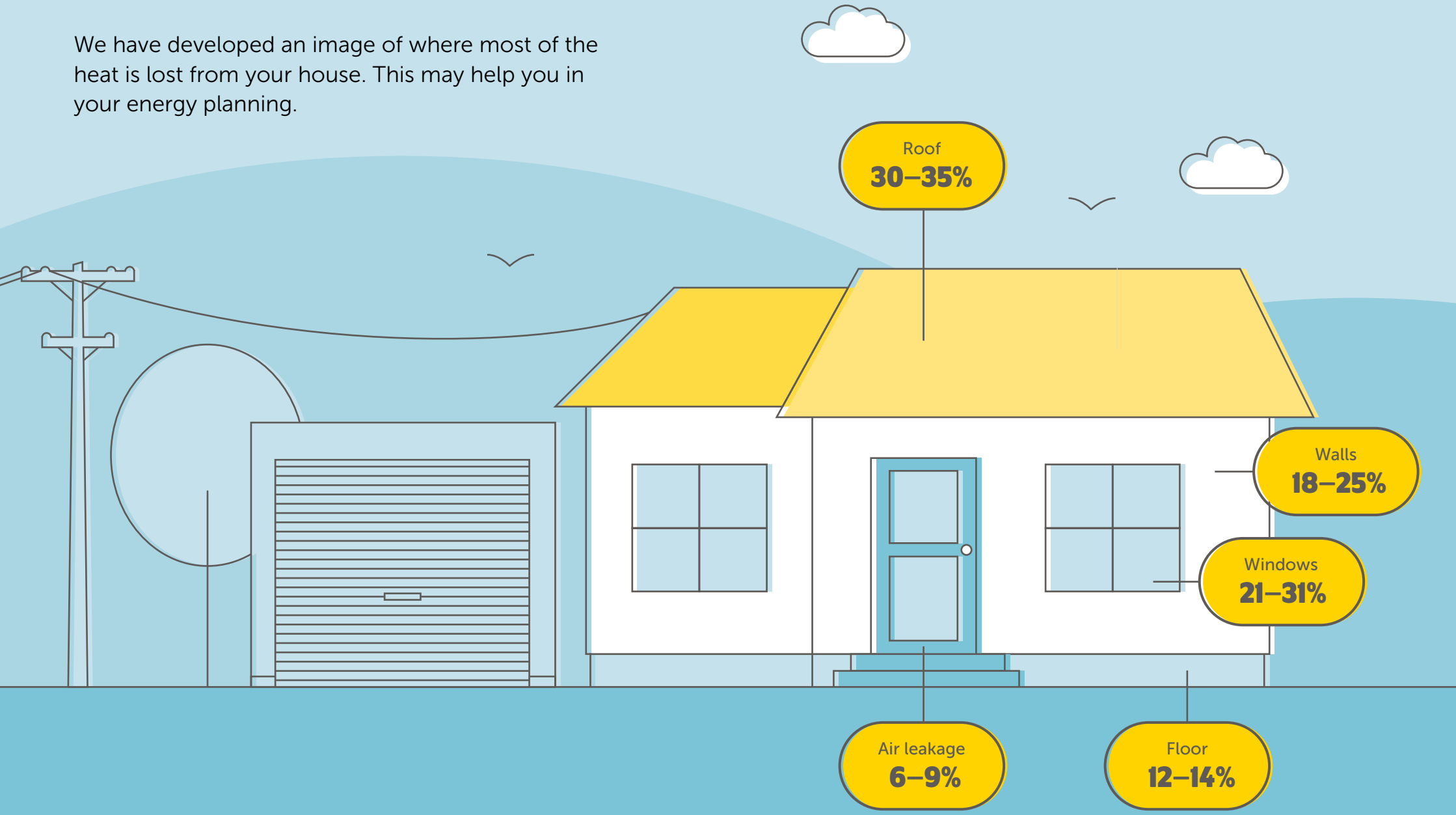
For example, you may have had a number of estimated bills in a row and your first 'actual' read after some months may be higher than usual.

You can:

- ask your provider to explain the bill
- if you are not satisfied with your provider's explanation, inform your provider that you want to complain (use the word complaint) and what you think is fair
- if you accept the bill is correct you can ask for more time to pay.

House heat loss

We have developed an image of where most of the heat is lost from your house. This may help you in your energy planning.



Electricity case study

Bills payment

When Jack moved into his property, he signed up for electricity with Energiser Power (EP). EP sent Jack estimated invoices for over a year. Unfortunately, EP underestimated Jack's usage so when EP took an actual read it sent Jack a back bill for just over $2,000.

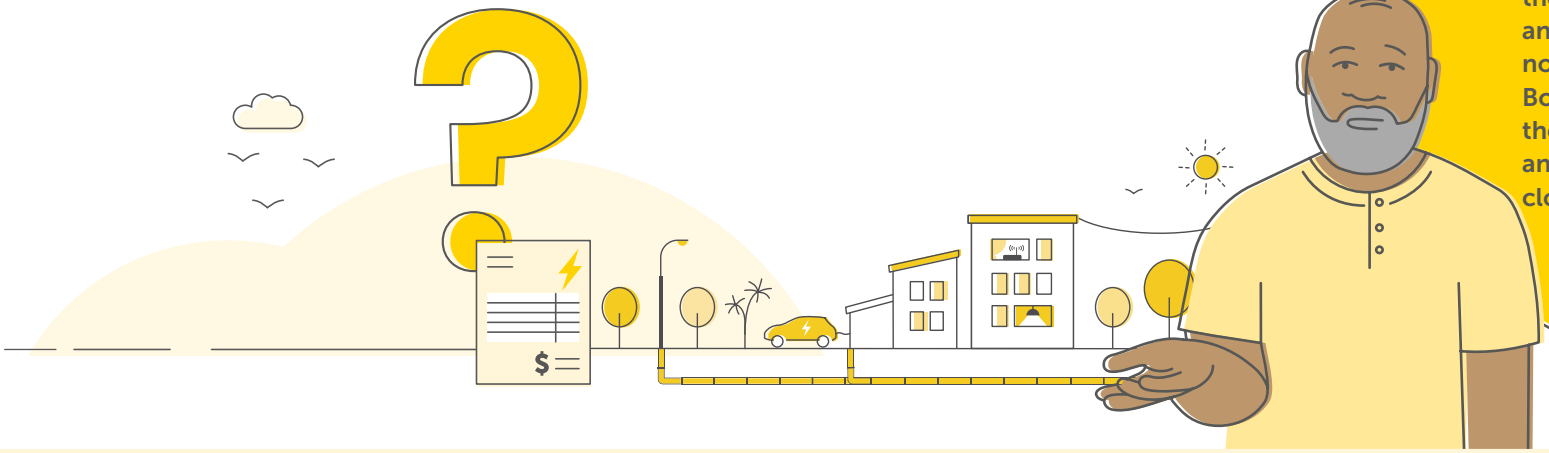
EP had tried to read the meter four times during the year but had not been able to access the meter. It emailed Jack on those four occasions saying he might be paying too much for his electricity.

After Jack complained, EP applied a different pricing plan which reduced the bill by $500. To resolve the complaint it offered Jack a further 30% off the amount and six months to pay. Jack said he would like to accept the offer but needed 12 months to pay. EP withdrew the offer saying the 30% discount had been conditional on Jack accepting the six months time frame.

Utilities Disputes found the offer to reduce the invoice by 30% was reasonable but denying Jack a further six months to pay was not.

The Electricity Authority's Consumer Care Guidelines (CCG) require retailers to provide effective assistance to consumers who have difficulties paying their bills. The consumer and the retailer should reach a compromise that is fair and reasonable to balance the customer's financial needs and the retailer's business needs.

Utilities Disputes found that EP did not provide effective assistance to Jack. For example, EP asked Jack to contact EP's credit team himself and at the same time said that doing so will unlikely lead to a better outcome.



Utilities Disputes recommended EP allow Jack 12 months to pay the reduced back bill and pay him $250 for not following the CCG. Both parties accepted the recommendation and the case was closed.

Names have been changed for privacy reasons.

Gas case study

The empty gas bottle

Anahera's gas was supplied via two 45kg LPG bottles, with bottles delivered regularly to her home. She relied on these bottles for heating, and for the operation of many of her appliances.

When one of the bottles became empty, Anahera would prepare for it to be replaced and tell her provider it needed to be swapped for a full bottle. Anahera would then rely on the second, backup bottle while waiting for the empty one to be replaced.

Anahera was switching out an empty LPG bottle one day when she noticed her back up bottle was also empty.

She immediately contacted her gas supplier's delivery service to get an urgent replacement as both bottles were empty. The supplier told Anahera she would need to pay a $250 for an urgent delivery fee. Because she needed the gas desperately, Anahera paid the fee, and the supplier delivered the gas bottle.

Soon after, Anahera complained to the supplier. She said she felt bullied into paying the fee. She also believed the supplier was responsible for creating the issue as the backup bottle must have been empty when it was originally delivered. The supplier said it did not deliver an empty bottle and would not return the urgent delivery fee.

Anahera brought the following complaints to Utilities Disputes:

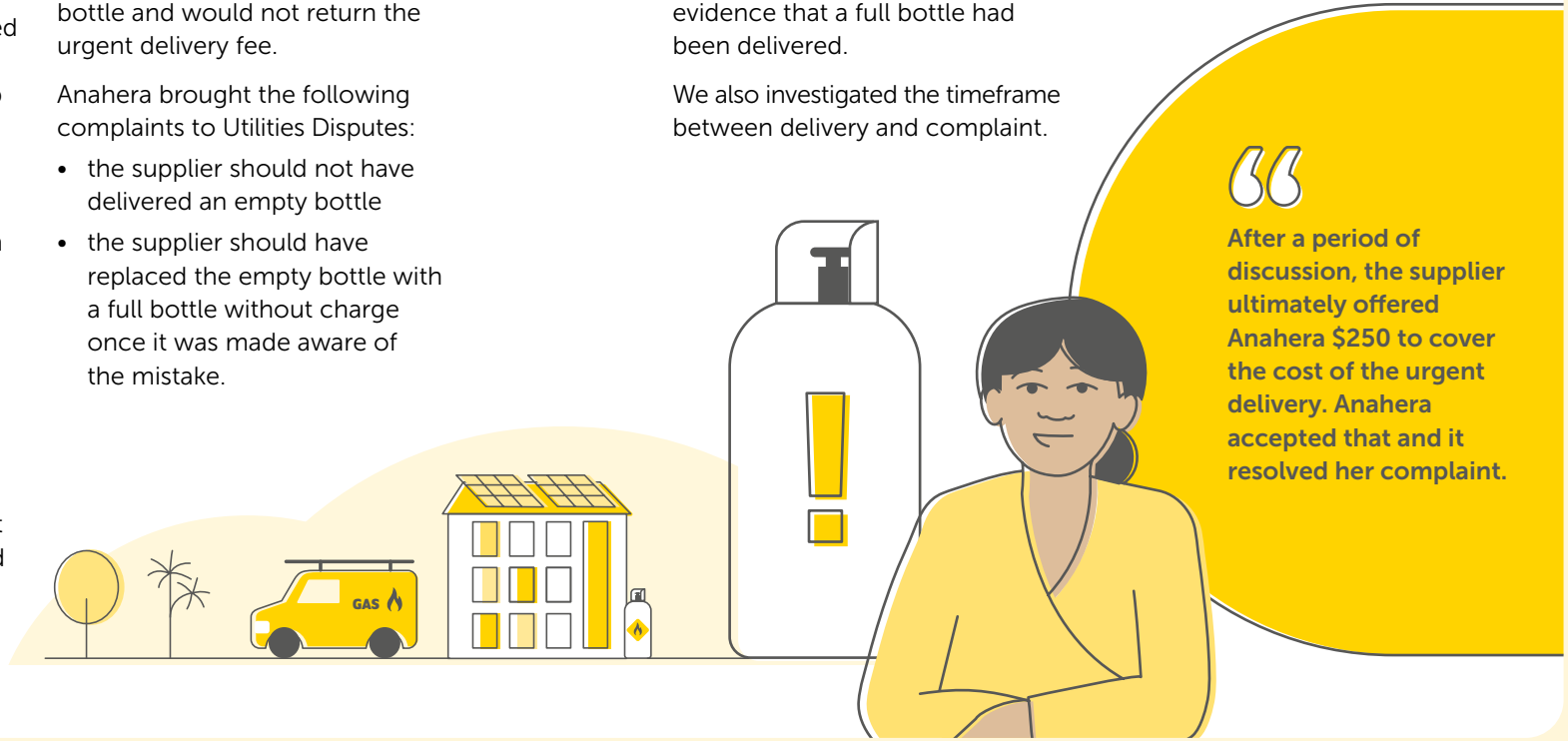
- the supplier should not have delivered an empty bottle
- the supplier should have replaced the empty bottle with a full bottle without charge once it was made aware of the mistake.

Utilities Disputes investigated the complaint. We began by considering the possibility of an empty bottle being delivered. We raised the possibility of a delivery error, or an unnoticed leak, with the supplier. Although it suggested this was highly unlikely, it could not provide evidence that a full bottle had been delivered.

We also investigated the timeframe between delivery and complaint.

Due to the regularity of Anahera's deliveries, we found that it would have been highly unlikely that she had used the entire backup bottle within the allotted time.

We took this information to facilitate negotiations between the complainant and the gas supplier.



After a period of discussion, the supplier ultimately offered Anahera $250 to cover the cost of the urgent delivery. Anahera accepted that and it resolved her complaint.

Names have been changed for privacy reasons.

Water case study

Burst water pipe

A burst waste water pipe owned by AB Water caused flooding in the downstairs area of Phil's rental property. It caused damage to the house and his tenants' belongings.

Phil lodged a claim with his insurance company which accepted the claim with a $2,000 excess.

Phil reimbursed his tenants $2,750 for damage to their property and waived $650 worth of rent. The waiver of rental was not covered by his insurance.

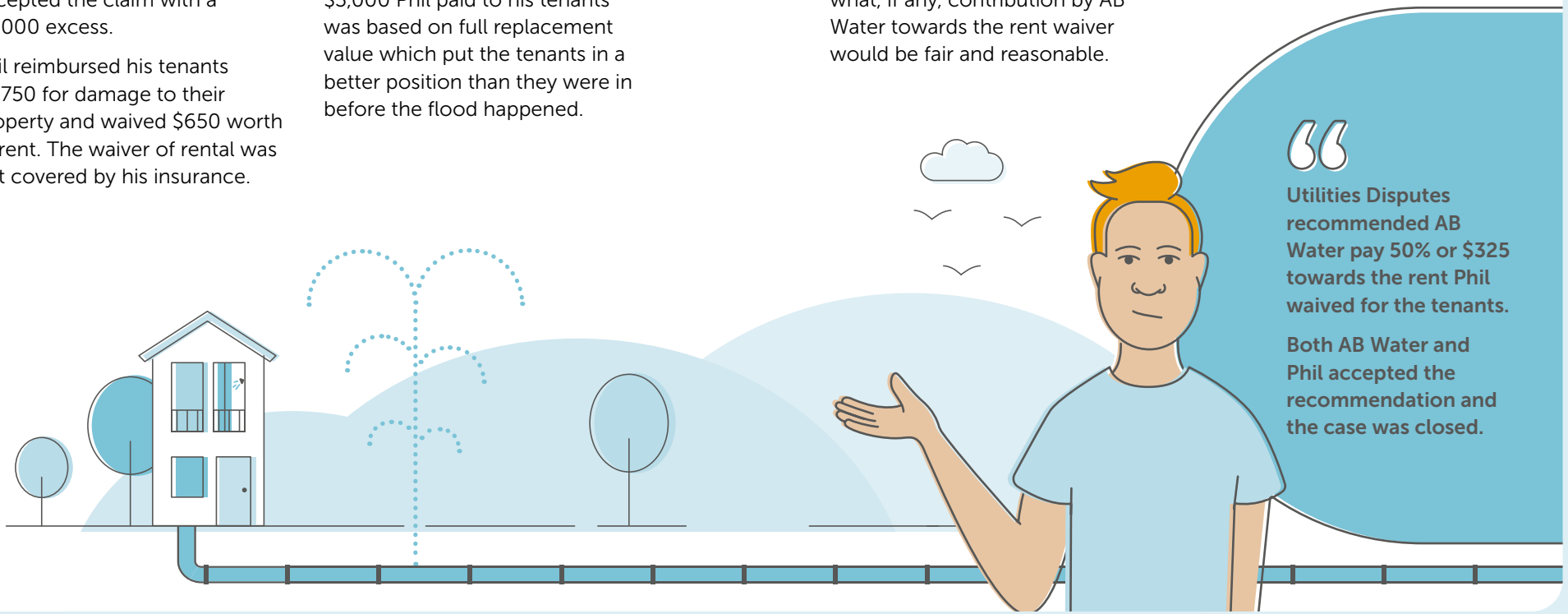
AB Water accepted it should pay the $2,000 insurance excess and offered to pay an additional $500 towards the tenants. Phil rejected the offer saying he wanted AB Water to pay all of his costs, $3,400 in addition to the $2,000.

Utilities Disputes found the $3,000 Phil paid to his tenants was based on full replacement value which put the tenants in a better position than they were in before the flood happened.

Utilities Disputes considered the age and condition of the damaged items and recommended $1,425 to be a reasonable amount for AB Water to contribute towards the tenants' loss.

Utilities Disputes also considered what, if any, contribution by AB Water towards the rent waiver would be fair and reasonable.

Some tenants needed to move out for a short time while the repairs were ongoing and others' enjoyment of the property was significantly impacted.



"Utilities Disputes recommended AB Water pay 50% or $325 towards the rent Phil waived for the tenants.

Both AB Water and Phil accepted the recommendation and the case was closed.

Names have been changed for privacy reasons.

Broadband case study

Fibre installation dispute

Lightning Fibre (LF) installed fibre in a multi unit complex. Marama owns one of the units. As part of the installation, LF attached the fibre cable to the exterior of Marama's unit.

Marama disputes LF had the right to install fibre directly to the outside of her unit because:

- LF did not provide her the required notice
- the unit is her own rather than shared property.

Marama was also unhappy about the quality of the installation.

LF said it accidentally sent notice to an incorrect address about the installation. It believes the exterior of the units was shared property under the Telecommunications Act 2021.

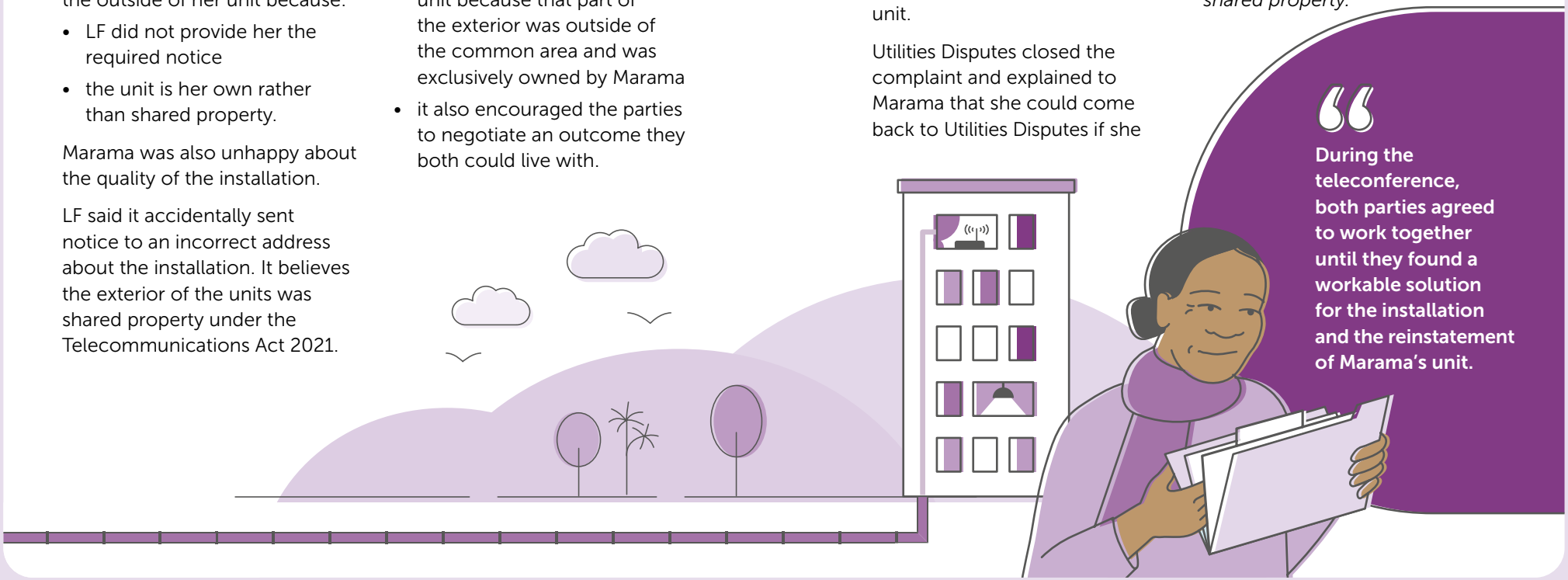
Utilities Disputes issued an initial decision stating:

- LF remedied the lack of notice by sending a new notice with the details of the installation to Marama
- LF was not entitled to use the exterior of Marama's unit because that part of the exterior was outside of the common area and was exclusively owned by Marama
- it also encouraged the parties to negotiate an outcome they both could live with.

After receiving the preliminary decision LF and Marama agreed to participate in a teleconference facilitated by Utilities Disputes. During the teleconference, both parties agreed to work together until they found a workable solution for the installation and the reinstatement of Marama's unit.

Utilities Disputes closed the complaint and explained to Marama that she could come back to Utilities Disputes if she and LF have any unresolved issues about the reinstatement.

Utilities Disputes is the dispute resolution scheme approved by the Telecommunications Act and can consider objections relating to the statutory right of access to install fibre on shared property.



During the teleconference, both parties agreed to work together until they found a workable solution for the installation and the reinstatement of Marama's unit.

Names have been changed for privacy reasons.

Useful contacts

If we can't help or you need other support you can contact the following organisations.

Banking Ombudsman
Te Whare Rama Tōkeke

The Banking Ombudsman helps you fix your banking problems. They are free and independent.

bankomb.org.nz

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
Ngā Pou Whakawhirinaki o Aotearoa

The CAB helps people to know and understand their rights and has offices throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

cab.org.nz

Community law centres

Community law centres are based throughout Aotearoa and offer advice and free legal help about a range of matters from employment law to family and immigration law and much more.

communitylaw.org.nz

Consumer NZ

Consumer NZ started in 1959 and is an independent not for profit organisation dedicated to getting New Zealanders a fairer deal.

consumer.org.nz

Powerswitch

Helps you find the cheapest electricity and gas plans – brought to you by Consumer NZ. Compare thousands of electricity and gas plans from 18 companies with our free, independent check.

powerswitch.org.nz

Billy

Billy is a free, independent power comparison and switching service brought to you by the Electricity Authority. Upload a recent bill or answer a few questions to compare plans and potential savings.

billy.govt.nz

FinCap

FinCap supports 200 free financial mentoring services across Aotearoa and advocates for changes that help prevent financial hardship. Financial mentors help people gain greater control of their money.

fincap.org.nz

MoneyTalks

MoneyTalks provides free support with budgeting, debt and everyday money matters. It can also connect people and whānau with local foodbanks and help them navigate Work and Income processes.

moneytalks.co.nz

Sorted

Sorted is a free service from Te Ara Ahunga Ora Retirement Commission, helping New Zealanders improve their financial wellbeing through trusted information, tools and guidance about managing money.

sorted.org.nz

DebtManagers

DebtManagers works with people and organisations to create fair, manageable repayment plans. Its approach focuses on respect, avoiding excessive fees and interest, and helping people regain financial confidence.

debtmanagers.co.nz

EnergyMate

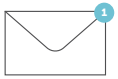
Offers free access online to practical energy advice including tips for reducing usage, guidance on improving energy efficiency and understanding your power bill, as well as useful information about the support available to households.

energymate.nz

Contact us

Phone

0800 22 33 40
+64 4 914 4630



Email

info@udl.co.nz

Mail

Freepost 192682
PO Box 5875
Wellington 6140

Physical address

Plan IT House
Level 6
22 The Terrace
Wellington 6011

Website and live chat

Contact us through Live Chat at the bottom-right of our website, or complete the online complaint form on our Making a complaint page. Outside of office hours, we aim to respond the next business day.

Office hours

Monday to Thursday 8am to 6pm
Friday 8am to 5pm
Saturday and Sunday closed

You can also contact us to arrange an appointment.

Want to make a complaint?

You can fill out our online complaint form and our staff will be in touch.

Go to udl.co.nz

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