

WATRS

Water Redress Scheme

ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X721

Date of Preliminary Decision: 5 January 2022

Party Details

Customer:

Company:

Complaint

The customer is unhappy because he has been charged the full cost for the water bills despite living alone at his property for over 24 years. He asks that the company provide him with a 25% discount on all bills he has paid to the company since he has been a single occupier at the property.

Response

The company does not have an option for a 25% discount for single occupiers in any of its tariffs. The customer has made significant savings since he was moved from the Rateable Value tariff to a metered tariff on 29 November 2019. The company has provided information to the customer about the REDACTED Scheme, which offers a discounted tariff for those customers whose incomes are below the economic threshold set in the Scheme, but the reduction in the bills would apply only from the date the company received the application.

Preliminary Findings

Section 143 of the Water Industry Act 1991 gives water companies the power to set their own Charges Schemes. The company's Charges Scheme does not provide a discount for single occupiers. The company has explained this information to the customer over the phone and in writing, and it has also provided him with the details of the REDACTED Scheme. Therefore, the customer is not entitled to obtain a refund for the single occupancy in his property.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

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Case Outline

The customer's complaint is that:

- The customer is unhappy with the charges paid for his water because he has not been provided with a 25% discount for single occupancy.
- The customer has lived alone in the property for over 24 years. He requests the company to refund sums equal to a 25% discount on all his bills since he started the single occupancy in the property.

The company's response is that:

- The company has explained to the customer in writing and over the phone that it does not have a single occupancy discount on any of its tariffs.
- The customer moved from a Rateable Value tariff to a smart meter on 29 November 2019 and he started making significant savings, which are around £250.00 a year.
- The company has offered the customer information on the REDACTED scheme, which allows those who qualify for the scheme to obtain a 50% discount on their water bills from the moment the application is made.

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.

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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 that the company has failed to provide its services to the standard one would reasonably expect and that 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 customer states that he has been living in his property alone for over 24 years and that he has never received a 25% discount for single occupancy. He would like to have this discount applied to his current metered tariff and to obtain a refund for having paid the full tariff since he started living alone. He was paying the Rateable Value (RV) tariff until 2019.
2. On 25 October 2019 the company provided the customer with a leaflet that stated that it was planning to fit meters on a compulsory basis to all domestic properties on his road. The customer wrote a letter to the company on 19 November 2019 stating that he did not wish to have a meter fitted in his property. The company replied to the customer on 26 November 2019 and explained that under section 162 of the Water Industry Act 1991 and The Water Industry (Prescribed Conditions) Regulations of 1999, water companies are allowed to have mandatory meters installed in a property which has been designated by the Secretary of State to be in an area of serious water distress. I am mindful that CCW also provided the customer with information about compulsory metering, which makes the use of water meters mandatory in many properties. On 29 November 2019 the customer was informed that his smart meter had been connected to his water supply and activated.
3. The company notes that the customer has a very low water consumption, which is around 8m³. The company calculated that with the metered tariff and the same level of consumption the customer would save around £250.00 every year. The company also notes that the customer has currently £491.45 in credit because he continued paying higher charges based on his previous RV tariff. The company states that the customer can either leave the credit on his account so that it can be used for future bills or that he can phone the company's billing team to arrange for a refund.

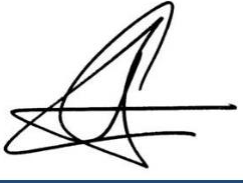
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4. Regarding the discounted tariffs, the company states that Section 143 of the Water Industry Act 1991 gives water companies the power to set their Charges Scheme. The company notes that its current Charges Scheme 2021/22 as well as its previous Charges Schemes have never provided a 25% discount for customers who live in a property as single occupiers. On 10 November 2020 the company sent a letter to the customer that explained how the RV and metered tariffs are calculated. The company also phoned the customer on 21 December 2020 to explain to him the water tariffs and how these are different from Council Tax charges as they do not offer a 25% discount for those living in single occupancy homes.
5. The company states that they only have a Single Occupier banding as part of their tariff. Section 5.3 of the company's Charges Scheme states that the X is only available to customers who have applied for a water meter but the company was unable to fit one at their property. I am mindful that this is not the customer's case as a meter was fitted in 2019. In view of that I find that the evidence does not show that the customer is entitled to a partial refund of his bills for living in his property alone.
6. The company states that it has informed the customer about the possibility of applying for the REDACTED Scheme if his financial circumstances show that he earns less than £19,747 a year. If he qualifies for this Scheme, he would be able to obtain a 50% discount from the date the company receives the application for the Scheme.
7. In light of the above, I find that the evidence shows that the company has provided its services to the standards to be reasonably expected in the industry as it has followed its Charge Scheme when refusing to offer the customer a 25% discount on his bills. Therefore, the customer's claim cannot succeed.

Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

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Pablo Cortés, Licenciado, LLM, PhD

Adjudicator

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