

# WATRS

## Water Redress Scheme

### ADJUDICATOR'S FINAL DECISION SUMMARY

Adjudication Reference: WAT-X932

Date of Final Decision: 10 June 2022

#### Party Details

**Customer:** The customer

**Company:** The company

#### Complaint

The customer claims that the company incorrectly charged him from 2008 when he advised the company that he was a single occupier. The customer is seeking the company to back date his charges from 2008 to reflect that he is a single occupier.

#### Response

The company says that until 20 December 2019, the company has no record of the customer requesting that his bill be reduced as he was a single occupier. The company has advised the customer that an Assessed Household Charge, which does take into account consider property occupancy levels, is only applicable when an application for a water meter has been made and it is found that it is not possible to fit one. As the customer refuses to apply for a meter, the customer has been correctly billed on a Rateable Value basis which does not consider property occupancy levels. The company has provided the customer with information on the alternatives available to help the customer reduce the bill. However, the customer has chosen not to take any of these options to date. The company has not made any offers of settlement.

#### Findings

I am satisfied the evidence points to the fact the company did not fail to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected regarding billing on a Rateable Value basis which does not consider property occupancy levels.

#### Outcome

The company does not need to take any further action.

The customer has until 8 July 2022 to accept or reject this decision

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## Case Outline

### **The customer's complaint is that:**

- The company incorrectly charged him from 2008 when he advised the company that he was a single occupier.
- The customer is seeking the company to back date his charges from 2008 to reflect that he is a single occupier.

### **The company's response is that:**

- Until 20 December 2019, the company has no record of the customer requesting that his bill be reduced as he was a single occupier.
- The company has advised the customer that an Assessed Household Charge, which does consider property occupancy levels, is only applicable when an application for a water meter has been made and it is found that it is not possible to fit one.
- As the customer refuses to apply for a meter, the customer has been correctly billed on a Rateable Value basis which does not consider property occupancy levels.
- The company has provided the customer with information on the alternatives available to help the customer reduce the bill. However, the customer has chosen not to take any of these options to date.

## 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.

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2. Whether or not the customer has suffered any financial loss or another disadvantage as a result of a failure by the company.

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 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 dispute centres around whether the company should backdate the customer's charges from 2008 to reflect that he is a single occupier.
2. The company must meet the standards set out in OFWAT's Charges Scheme Rules, the Water Supply and Sewerage Services (Customer Service Standards) Regulations 2008 and the Water Industry Act 1991.
3. The company also has certain obligations regarding its customer services as set out in OFWAT Guaranteed Standards Scheme and its own Customer Guarantee Scheme (CGS).
4. The evidence shows that between 20 December 2019 and 25 March 2022, the company received various complaints on behalf of the Customer from CCWater wanting his bill reduced as he lived alone. The evidence shows that on 26 March 2020, the customer stopped paying his charges as he believed that his charges were excessive, and since this time, arrears have accrued on his account.
5. I understand that the company responded to these complaints through CCWater, explaining that the customer is correctly charged on an unmeasured basis, and these bills cannot be reduced. The alternative was for the customer to consider a meter. The evidence shows that during this period, the company also gave the customer the option to apply for its social tariff and offered help with the arrears, inviting the customer to apply to the **XX** Community Trust.
6. On 1 April 2022, the customer contacted the company to decline its offer to install a meter, to which the company provided other options for the customer to help reduce his outstanding

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balance. However, the customer remained unhappy as he believed that he should be placed on a tariff that reflects that he is a single occupier, and on 8 April 2022, the customer commenced the WATRS adjudication process.

7. As to whether the company correctly charged the customer, the evidence shows the customer was billed on a Rateable Value. The Rateable Value is based on the value of the customer's property, its location, and the proximity to local amenities and was set in the 1970s by an independent District Valuer and the Local Authority. From the evidence put forward by the company, the Rateable Value system does not consider whether or not the property has single occupancy, and the company offers no single person reduction.
8. The company has two tariff systems in place, either the Rateable Value or by a meter. If a meter cannot be installed at the property, then the customer can be placed on an Assessed Household Charge, which does consider property occupancy levels. However, the evidence shows that the customer has declined to have a water meter installed. Therefore, I find the customer has been billed the correct Rateable Value.
9. The company has certain obligations in respect of its customer services. From the evidence provided, such as the timeline set out in the company's defence, I am satisfied that by the end of the company's dialogue with the customer, the company had adequately explained the reasons behind the Assessed Household Charge and Rateable Value Tariff and how they were applied regarding single occupancy. Furthermore, the company has provided the customer with information on the alternatives available to help the customer reduce his charges.
10. Considering the above, I find the evidence does not prove the company failed to provide its services to the customer to the standard to be reasonably expected by the average person concerning its charges and the customer being a single occupier. Regarding customer service, I am satisfied the company provided a reasonable level of customer service throughout its dialogue with the customer.

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### **Outcome**

The company needs to take no further action.

### **What happens next?**

- This adjudication decision is final and cannot be appealed or amended.
- The customer must reply by 6 July 2022 to accept or reject this decision.
- When you tell WATRS that you accept or reject the decision, the company will be notified of this. The case will then be closed.
- If you do not tell WATRS that you accept or reject the decision, this will be taken to be a rejection of the decision.



**Mark Ledger FCI Arb**  
**Adjudicator**

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