

SPSO decision report

Case: 201600660, Business Stream
Sector: water
Subject: policy/administration
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about Business Stream. Mr C runs a charity shop and had applied for water rates exemption for the premises. Mr C was unhappy about the way that Business Stream handled his request for water rates exemption (a scheme where property owners can be exempt from paying part or all of a water bill for a property, based on various criteria). In particular, he was concerned about communication between Business Stream and his organisation. He was also concerned that Business Stream did not submit the application for exemption to Scottish Water to make the final decision, as he felt this would be the usual process. Mr C also had concerns about the amount he was paying for his water and, following investigation by Business Stream, his previous meter had been removed and replaced. Mr C was unhappy with the rateable value Business Stream used for his premises when calculating the outstanding balance.

Following investigation we found that Business Stream had failed to provide Mr C with a reasonable level of service in relation to his application for exemption as they had failed to respond to his correspondence in a timely manner. They had also failed to provide a clear explanation of why the information submitted was not sufficient to allow them to pass the application onto Scottish Water. Therefore, we upheld Mr C's complaint. However, following receipt of information from Scottish Water, we established that it was not unreasonable for Business Stream not to send the application to Scottish Water when they did not have all of the information required to support the application.

We also found that Business Stream had used the correct rateable value in line with their rateable value policy. We therefore did not uphold this aspect of Mr C's complaint. We did not see any evidence that Business Stream had responded to Mr C's correspondence asking them about this issue and we therefore recommended that they now respond to him about this.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for failing to respond to his correspondence in a timely manner and for failing to provide a clear explanation of why they did not pass the application to Scottish Water. This apology should comply with SPSO guidelines on making an apology, available at www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance.
- Respond to Mr C's correspondence regarding the rateable value of the property.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- Correspondence from customers about exemption applications should be responded to in a timely manner. Replies should provide clear explanations to customers if Business Stream considers that information submitted in an exemption application is incomplete.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations

we have made on this case by the deadline we set.