



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

T 03459 335577
helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

Dr Carolyn Wilkins
Chief Executive, Oldham MBC
Level 3, Civic Centre
West Street
Oldham
OL1 1UT

Your ref: Council-Water Poverty-20150715
Our ref: PO381251/GW

August 2015

From Rory Stewart OBE MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs

Dear Dr Wilkins

Thank you for your letter of 17 July to the Secretary of State about water poverty and the support available to customers. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I'm grateful for the steps you are taking to help promote and support the work of United Utilities in helping those customers who may have difficulty paying their bills.

Due to geographical and population differences the cost of water bills varies regionally. This, combined with differing socio-economic circumstances, mean that the challenges faced by water companies in England and Wales can vary greatly. This means that a definition of water poverty in legislation would be too rigid for all regions, and therefore potentially unhelpful when trying to support those in most difficulty.

Defra issued social tariffs guidance in 2012 that encourages water companies to develop social tariffs in consultation with their customers. The guidance allows water companies to design schemes with differing eligibility, levels of support and how they are funded to reflect local needs and the views of their own customers. Water companies' customers must broadly support schemes because they are funded through cross subsidy by ineligible customers.

All water companies have developed support for vulnerable customers and since April 2015, 14 water companies offer a social tariff. These are in addition to WaterSure, the Government mandated social tariff that all companies provide.

RORY STEWART MP



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE