

## **Business owner's rates bill written off after Ombudsman intervention**

A woman who wrongly received a rates bill for over £1,000 has had the bill reduced to zero after an investigation by the Ombudsman's office.

The woman received the bill four years after she bought a property, which had previously been a Post Office. She subsequently turned it into a café. When she received her first annual rates bill it stated that she did not need to pay rates on the property. She contacted the Land and Property Services (LPS) to say that it must have made a mistake, but she was told that the bill was correct.

She said that for the next three years her rates bill was zero, but when she raised it with the LPS, each time she was told it was accurate. However, in 2020 she received a bill for over £1,300, backdated to when she first moved into the premises.

When she contacted the LPS to ask for an explanation, she was told that the Post Office exemption for the property had remained in place by mistake. This had been rectified when the LPS assessed the woman's claim for a Covid-19 Small Business Grant.

When she complained, the LPS awarded her a 25% reduction in the amount owed. She contacted the Ombudsman because she believed this was still not fair.

An investigator from the Ombudsman's office found that the LPS had acted in line with its own guidance by awarding the 25% reduction, but also noted a section in the 'Shortfall in Service Policy' which said it *'may consider whether the ratepayer has acted in 'good faith' in their interactions with LPS and that any additional liability can be considered for a 100% reduction.'*

By querying the rates bill every year, the investigator believed that the woman had acted in good faith throughout the process. The investigator therefore asked the LPS for its views on whether a 25% reduction was sufficient.

After reviewing its decision, the LPS decided to award a 100% write off of the bill under the 'good faith' clause of its Shortfall in Service Policy.