



# Ombudsman's Commentary

## FEBRUARY 2006 REPORTS

**In accordance with our new reporting procedure, my office has laid five reports before the Scottish Parliament today. Two relate to the health sector, one to housing, and two to local government. One of the health complaints was largely upheld, and the other was not upheld. The housing complaint was not upheld, and of the local government complaints one was upheld and one not upheld. In each case, the public bodies concerned have accepted my conclusions and recommendations.**

### Health reports

#### Lack of dignity in nursing care

The complaint about Greater Glasgow NHS Board centred around a patient's claim that the care provided by nursing staff was insufficient. I have upheld most aspects of the complaint, including that the patient (referred to in the report as Mr C) was not provided with assistance to wash prior to his chemotherapy treatment; that he may have been ridiculed by a staff nurse; and that his bed was used for examining another patient.

The report highlights an aspect of care about which I am increasingly concerned. While there is no evidence of any clinical failings, there is a manifest lack of respect for the dignity of the patient. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon theme in health cases investigated by my office. While I recognise that at busy times hospitals will have to prioritise service delivery, I urge health workers to attend not only to the physical symptoms of patients in their care but also to demonstrate respect for their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

The report also states that some explanations provided by staff to Mr C were inadequate and that his nursing assessment on admission form

was incomplete. These are classic failings in communication, to which I drew attention in my last Commentary (December 2005). It is vital that systems are in place to ensure that there is good communication with patients (and their relatives where appropriate) so that they are involved in the different aspects and stages of treatment and care and second to ensure that there is effective communication between staff in the delivery of such treatment and care.

I am also critical of the way in which Mr C's complaints were handled by the Board. I am pleased to note that the Board has accepted my recommendations and has already implemented several changes that aim to eradicate the likelihood of such instances of insufficient nursing care arising in the future.

The second health case about Fife NHS Board involved a complaint by a patient's relatives about his medical assessments; medication, and falls that occurred while he was in care; and the Board's response to the complaint. I have not upheld any aspect of the complaint.

### Housing and Local Government

In the complaints about West Whitlawburn Housing Cooperative Ltd (a claim for compensation for alleged damage to bathroom fittings) and Renfrewshire Council (alleged failure to complete work on a pathway to a good standard), I am satisfied that there was no evidence of maladministration or service failure on the part of either body.

While the complaint about North Ayrshire Council (about the handling of the sale of a council house) was upheld in the main, I have commended the council for acknowledging the shortcomings identified in the investigation and for providing redress including an apology to the complainant.

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## Ombudsman's overview

I am pleased to note that in each case, the body concerned has accepted my recommendations. In line with SPSO statutory responsibilities and practice, the office will follow up with the relevant body to ensure that they implement the actions to which they have agreed.

As I did in my December Commentary, I would emphasise that the issues raised in the complaints about Greater Glasgow NHS Board and North Ayrshire Council are not peculiar to the bodies subject to these investigations. I would urge other health boards and councils in Scotland to consider to what extent the lessons learned and recommendations made in handling these particular complaints are relevant to circumstances in their own areas.

The compendium of reports can be found on the SPSO website, [www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk).



**Alice Brown.** 28.02.2006

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