

SPSO decision report

Case: 201105521, Falkirk Council
Sector: local government
Subject: repairs and maintenance
Outcome: upheld, with recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained that the council failed to provide her with an adequate repairs service to her council property. She said that, since moving into her home in 2007, she had reported numerous problems requiring attention. She said that the quality of the repairs carried out by the council was inadequate and the repairs appointment service was poor.

Our investigation found that over the five years concerned there were some occasions when the council cancelled repairs appointments and others where they were unable to gain access to Ms C's property. Given the time period involved, the number of occasions where appointments were not kept, by either party, did not seem unreasonable. We noted that the council had explained that they had raised the issue of timescales for appointments with their staff, that further training would be provided and that they apologised for their failings in this area. They had also advised staff to ensure that all future repair work involved a suitable appointment to minimise disruption, and highlighted the need for better communication. In terms of the quality of the repairs, however, the evidence suggested that over an 18-month period there were numerous occasions when Ms C reported unsatisfactory repairs or inadequacies in the repairs service. We were concerned that the council did not appear to have a record of these reported concerns, when Ms C's emails clearly showed that she had made them aware of the issues at the time. Although we noted that in their responses to Ms C's formal complaint the council expressed concerns about the length of time it took for some repairs to be done and that they had highlighted this with staff, we upheld the complaint as the evidence suggested that the council did fail to provide Ms C with an adequate repairs service over this period.

In our decision on this case, we made reference to remedial action that the council said they had taken as a result of Ms C's formal complaint. When we asked them to provide evidence of some of this, they indicated that they could not do so. Where a council has investigated a complaint and found failings in the service provided, we would expect them to keep records of any remedial action taken and so we addressed this in our recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

provide Ms C with a written apology for failing to provide an adequate repairs service;

feed back our decision on this complaint to the staff involved;

take steps to ensure that in future all reports of inadequate repairs are logged on their systems; and

take steps to ensure that in future they keep documentary evidence of any remedial action taken as a result of their investigation of a complaint.