

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201202345, Lothian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** appointments/admissions (delay, cancellation, waiting lists)  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C complained that she experienced an unreasonable delay in receiving appointment notification letters from the board. After she was referred to a respiratory clinic by her GP, the board wrote inviting her to an appointment at the clinic. Mrs C did not receive this letter until after the time of the appointment on the day it was due to be held. The letter was dated seven days earlier. It had been sent via a private delivery firm and had not been stamped with the date it had been posted. Mrs C went to her medical practice and a receptionist phoned the hospital to rearrange the appointment.

The board wrote to Mrs C the next day to confirm the rearranged appointment time and date. Mrs C received the letter two days later. The envelope was marked first class and had two Royal Mail first class stamps on it. She attended the appointment four days later, but returned home to find another letter inviting her to the appointment. The letter had been dated six days earlier. It had been sent via the private firm and had not been stamped with the date it had been posted. The letter said that if she failed to keep the appointment without notifying them in advance, she would not necessarily be given another one.

Mrs C did not receive the two appointment letters posted via the private firm until after the appointments were due to be held. In view of this, we upheld the complaint. In addition, we found that Mrs C had told the board that she was deaf. However, in their response to her complaint, they said that she should phone them if she had any questions.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- carry out a further audit of the time taken for letters posted via the private delivery firm to arrive and take appropriate action on the results of this audit;
- provide clarification to staff on when first class Royal Mail/private delivery postage should be used; and
- issue a written apology for stating that Mrs C should contact the complaints team on the phone number provided if she had any questions, despite the fact she had told them she was deaf.