

SPSO decision report

Case: 201401329, Falkirk Council
Sector: local government
Subject: repairs and maintenance
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C, a tenant of the council, complained about difficulties arranging repairs to her home. Mrs C said there were delays in carrying out several repairs, and the council failed to return her calls or communicate with her, except when she made formal complaints. Mrs C was also concerned that her energy costs for the year were very high, which she thought could be due to the delays in repairs to windows and doors, or to a fault in her boiler (which was not inspected by the council for two months after she reported it).

The council accepted that their communication was poor, and apologised to Mrs C for this. However, the council said that the energy costs could not have been affected by the faulty boiler, as this would have used less, not more, electricity.

After investigating these issues, we upheld Mrs C's complaints. There was no evidence that the faulty boiler increased Mrs C's energy costs and, while the delays in repairing the doors and windows might have affected her heating costs, it was not possible to determine this for certain. However, we found that there was unreasonable delay in the council inspecting Mrs C's faulty boiler, as well as in carrying out several repairs to her house. We also found that the council did not respond reasonably to Mrs C's attempts to contact them, except when she made formal complaints.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- consider inspecting boiler and heating systems (to ensure they are functioning properly, in addition to electrical safety) as part of the preparation of a void property for a new tenancy;
- apologise to Mrs C for the failings our investigation found;
- review their processes to ensure that repair requests are promptly recorded and carried out, including where requests are made verbally, or as a result of a property visit; and
- take steps to ensure there is a robust process for logging and following up calls relating to housing repairs.