

SPSO decision report

Case: 201502752, Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board
Sector: local government
Subject: communication, staff attitude and confidentiality
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C took over business premises and carried out alterations to sub-divide it into separate units which he hoped could be rated separately for non-domestic rates purposes. Mr C said that Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board did not communicate effectively with him about the valuations.

We found that although the valuation joint board had visited Mr C's business premises, there was no clear record of what had been discussed or agreed during that visit in terms of how the units would be treated from a valuation perspective, particularly concerning an interconnecting door between two of the units and a unit which had been further sub-divided into offices. Although the valuation joint board said they had explained to Mr C what was required before the units could be split we found a lack of evidence to support that position.

We found it had taken too long for the valuation joint board to separate one of the units, even after they had all the information they needed. They continued to contact Mr C by phone after he had asked twice for communication to be in writing or by email. We found it took too long for the valuation joint board to acknowledge an appeal and a complaint made by Mr C. We also found that an addressing error was not corrected in the timescale claimed by the valuation joint board.

Additionally we found the valuation joint board's response to Mr C's complaint failed to properly address a key issue that he had complained about, notably that their communication failed to address the points he had raised, which was unacceptable. We upheld Mr C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- carry out a review of record-keeping and communication, taking into account the issues identified with a view to making improvements and communicating changes to staff, and report back when the review is complete; and
- offer an apology for the communication failings identified.