

SPSO decision report

Case: 201504898, Glasgow City Council
Sector: local government
Subject: council tax
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

When Mr and Mrs C decided to buy their housing association property they needed certificates from the council which showed their council tax payments were up to date. When they asked for the certificates the council said one could not be issued for Mrs C because she had council tax arrears. The council said the debt would need to be managed by their debt management partner.

We found that when Mr C first contacted the council they took around six weeks to deal with his enquiry, which was too long. The council provided inaccurate information to Mrs C by failing to include arrears from a previous address. The council also failed to pass the correct information to the debt management partner, which meant that Mrs C was only asked to pay a portion of the total amount outstanding. This caused a further delay. It was not until after Mr C complained that the council realised they had not notified Mr and Mrs C about arrears that Mrs C had at a previous address. All of this amounted to unreasonable confusion. The council explained that these things were the result of staff error.

We considered the council's handling of Mr and Mrs C's complaint. We found that the council had responded in time to the complaint. However the response failed to address Mr C's questions about how or why discrepancies had arisen in respect of the amounts owed, or what action had been taken as a result.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- apologise for the multiple failings identified in the administration of the council tax debt and in the handling of the complaint; and
- provide a balanced account which sets out exactly what was owed in council tax, broken down by year, which accounts for all the amounts paid, any charges added, and any amounts written off.