

SPSO decision report

Case: 201507448, Aberdeen City Council
Sector: local government
Subject: policy/administration
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that the council failed to resolve flooding in his house which appeared to be coming from a nearby culverted burn (a burn that is diverted through a pipe). Although the council undertook some investigations including a camera survey which found that the pipe did not follow the expected route, they were not able to survey the full length of the pipe due to an inaccessible manhole. They told Mr C they were not responsible for repairs as the problem appeared to be on private land.

Mr C disagreed and contacted his councillor. After a meeting with all parties the council agreed to undertake a dowser survey (a test used to detect the presence of water) to trace the route of the pipe. The survey was undertaken but the council did not contact Mr C after this or respond to his email asking about next steps.

After investigating these issues we upheld Mr C's complaint about communication. We found it was unreasonable that the council did not share the results of the dowser survey with Mr C or respond to his email about this. We also found the council did not give Mr C clear and consistent information about what he could expect from them as they told him the repairs were not their responsibility but also continued to indicate that future work was anticipated.

We did not uphold Mr C's complaint about the repairs as we found the council had taken reasonable steps to check that the repairs were not their responsibility.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- apologise to Mr C for the failure in communication;
- remind relevant staff of the importance of documenting meetings, in particular agreed outcomes; and
- consider and address relevant staff training needs in relation to clear communication and managing expectations.