

SPSO decision report

Case: 201702738, West Lothian Council
Sector: local government
Subject: refuse collections & bins
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained to the council as her bins were not being collected as required. Ms C was part of an assisted take out service due to her ill health but her bins were not always being lifted or, when they were, they were not returned to the correct place. Ms C made numerous complaints about this but believed that the situation noticeably worsened when she witnessed her neighbour speaking with a member of staff who, following the conversation, did not empty Ms C's bin. She was of the view that her neighbour was influencing staff not to empty her bins as part of a long running dispute. The council's response was to advise Ms C that she needed to leave her bins within the boundary of her property, and not place them on the shared driveway, as this was confusing for staff. Ms C remained unhappy with the council's position and brought her complaint to us.

Ms C complained that the council failed to provide a reasonable bin collection service and that their response to her complaint was unreasonable. We investigated information provided by both parties and advised Ms C we would not be investigating her neighbour's involvement as records from the council showed that Ms C had been experiencing this problem long before the incident with her neighbour. The records from the council showed a clear pattern of repeated failings. We upheld Ms C's complaint and asked the council to apologise to her for continually failing to empty her bins. We also noted the council had introduced a number of new processes to increase accountability for staff and they hoped this would see an improvement in service provision. We asked the council to evidence the impact of the changes they had made.

Regarding the council's response to Ms C's complaint, we found that the response was inadequate as it appeared to suggest Ms C was to blame for her bins not being emptied. We also found that the changes that the council told us they had implemented to improve the service were not referred to in their complaints response. We upheld this aspect of Ms C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Ms C for repeated failings when collecting her bins and for the poor content of the response to her complaint.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.