

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201901683, Angus Council  
**Sector:** Local Government  
**Subject:** child services and family support  
**Decision:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained on behalf of their family member (A) in relation to a number of aspects of the social work service provided to A's family. A is the parent of two children who are in temporary foster care. C raised concerns about poor communication, the council continuing to use inaccurate reports (despite agreeing to amend these) and the council's handling of their complaint.

We took independent advice from a social worker. In relation to C's concerns about communication, we found that a number of aspects of the council's communication were reasonable. However, we found that the council did not provide A with adequate updates or explanation for the delay in arranging a court date for a hearing in relation to the placement of A's children. On this basis, we upheld this aspect of the complaint.

Regarding C's concerns about the accuracy of reports provided to the Children's Reporter (a person who makes decisions to help young people who need care and protection), we found that the council, as author and owner of the report, retained responsibility for the content. We noted that the council should ensure the accuracy of the reports provided and make reasonable attempts to correct the record when information previously provided is known to be inaccurate. We upheld this aspect of the complaint.

Finally, we found a number of failings in the council's handling of C's complaints. We identified investigation delays and issues with the council's communication about timeframes. We also found that some points of complaint were not addressed in the response, whilst other points had not been investigated thoroughly enough. We upheld this aspect of the complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to A for not providing adequate updates or explanation for the delay in arranging a court date (and provide an explanation for the delay). Apologise for failing to take appropriate steps to ensure the accuracy of reports provided to and circulated by Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and the complaint handling failings. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets](http://www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets).

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- Consistent with the Scottish Government's guidance, parents with parental rights and responsibilities should be given timely information and be involved in decision-making to the maximum amount consistent with the child's welfare.
- The council should ensure that information within social work reports are accurate, including reasonable attempts to correct the record if the council becomes aware of other organisations relying on outdated or inaccurate versions.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Where possible, complaints should not be allocated to an investigating officer on annual leave. Where this cannot be avoided, the complainant should be updated and given an extended deadline for the response. The council should respond to all points of the complaint and give an apology and explanation where it is accepted things have gone wrong. Complaint investigations should take into account any relevant policies and procedures and assess whether the council's actions complied with these.

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.