

SPSO decision report

Case: 202002615, The Highland Council
Sector: Local Government
Subject: Economic development plans / issues
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about the council's decision-making in relation to the allocation of Scottish Government Town Centre funding. In terms of the relevant governance arrangements, local Area Committees were expected to identify and rank eligible projects for the funding. C complained that their local Area Committee had failed to publicise the scheme, failed to invite applications and failed to discuss the funding in meetings. C complained that there was a lack of transparency in the council's decision-making process.

With regard to the complaint about lack of community engagement, the council said that they were not operating a challenge fund. The council's position was that the grant was allocated to projects in accordance with the governance arrangements agreed by the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee.

We found that the council failed to follow appropriate processes when making decisions regarding the allocation of Scottish Government Town Centre Funding. Specifically, we found that the council failed to evidence how they followed the agreed process that Area Committees become involved in identifying and recommending projects. There was no public record as to how the decision to recommend a particular project was reached and there was no evidence as to how this project was assessed as meeting the eligibility criteria. Taking all of the above into consideration, we upheld the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to follow appropriate processes when making decisions regarding the allocation of Scottish Government Town Centre Funding. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

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

- Decision-making processes are followed, and the rationale for decision-making (including which projects to recommend for funding) is publicly available in the form of meeting agendas and minutes.

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.