

SPSO decision report



Case: 202111128, The City of Edinburgh Council
Sector: Local Government
Subject: Council Tax
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about The City of Edinburgh Council's administration of their council tax account. C complained that the council issued reminders for council tax arrears and threats of legal action when they had paid their council tax in accordance with a payment arrangement. C also complained that the council failed to respond to their complaint in accordance with their Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP).

The council apologised for delay in responding to C's complaint. They said that a council tax payment reminder had been sent to C as they had made a payment without using their reference number. This had meant that the payment hadn't been allocated to C's account.

C remained unhappy and asked us to investigate. C complained that the council had failed to respond to their correspondence and had failed to take the fact that they are a vulnerable person into account.

We found that the council had repeatedly failed to engage with C's correspondence over a significant period of time. We found serious and repeated failures by the council to adhere to their CHP. We considered that the council acted without any consideration or accommodation of C's vulnerability. Therefore, we upheld C's complaints.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the failings identified in the administration of C's council tax and in the handling of their complaint. 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:

- Enquiries about council tax payments, especially where the council is claiming no payment has been made and the customer is stating the contrary, should be dealt with and responded to promptly.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- The necessary systems and procedures should be in place to ensure that complaints are handled in line with the council's complaints policy and procedure and that all staff are aware of the complaints handling policy and procedure.

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.