

## April 2021

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### Independent National Whistleblowing Officer launch

On 1 April 2021, we successfully launched the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO) service. The date coincided with the implementation of the new National Whistleblowing Standards (the Standards) which also went live.

Marking the launch, Rosemary Agnew, the INWO, said:

*"Today marks a real step forward for anyone raising a concern in Scotland's NHS. The National Whistleblowing Standards support and protect anyone who speaks up. This will help make Scotland's NHS an even better place to work and to receive care in line with its values and aims."*

The launch of this service is the culmination of months of work with the NHS, Scottish Government, unions, regulators, whistleblowers and the third-sector. Reflecting on this, Rosemary and her team pass on their thanks to everyone who has played a part in getting us to this important milestone.

More information, including advice on how to raise a concern about an NHS Scotland service, and resources can be found on the [INWO website](#).

#### *INWO e-bulletins*

Our INWO team sends out regular updates with further information about the service. [Our April e-bulletin can be found here](#).

If you would like to receive future e-bulletins from the INWO straight to your inbox, please [register here to sign up to the mailing list](#).

## Our findings

### Complaints

We have chosen not to lay any decisions before the Scottish Parliament while they are in a campaign recess prior to the parliamentary election on 6 May 2021. Normal publication will resume next month.

### Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

#### *Statistics*

During March we:

- responded to 114 enquiries
- made 92 decisions
  - 10 community care grants
  - 61 crisis grants
  - 21 self-isolation support grants
- upheld three (30%) community care grants, six (10%) crisis grants and three (14%) self-isolation support grants
- signposted an additional 166 applicants to other sources of assistance. More than half of these (96) were calling us instead of their local council in error. Thirty-three applicants were calling at an earlier stage in the process and we were not able to consider their case at independent review. They were signposted back to the council or given advice about the process. Thirteen applicants noted that they were unable to contact their council as there was no Freephone number in place. We received nine enquiries from councils looking for advice.

#### *Case studies*

In recent weeks, we have determined cases in which the council did not make sufficient enquiries to arrive at a robust decision.

In one case, the applicant (C) had applied for a crisis grant after their mother had passed away. This was because the bank had frozen the mother's bank account into which C's furlough payments had been paid into, and so C was unable to access them.

The council initially awarded an amount for 14 days up until their Universal Credit (UC) payment amount. At first tier review, the applicant advised that they were not due to receive any UC and so the council awarded a further amount to take the duration of the award up to their furlough payment.

We reviewed the council's case file and spoke with C for further information. In doing so, we established that C's mother had debts on their meters when she passed away and as such, this was being deducted when C was topping up the meter. Therefore, we disagreed with the council's assessment that only £137.94 should be awarded. This was due to the fact that C requested a higher amount on their application form but the council awarded a standard amount and did not make further enquiries about how much was required to meet the need. We also noted that the daily rate calculation did not take into account the 1.7% benefits increase in April 2020. Additionally, we provided feedback that no decision letters were sent. We instructed

the council to award an additional £42.42 which had been calculated on a pro-rata basis to cover the debts on the meters.

Further examples can be found in the searchable directory [on our website](#) under the title '*Decision making with limited information*'.

## Model Complaints Handling Procedures

All public bodies should now have a complaints handling procedure that is compliant with the revised Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP). A video presentation giving an overview of the key changes to the procedure and other relevant tools and resources are available on our website [here](#).

Organisations should have appropriate self-assessment arrangements in place to provide assurance that complaints are handled in accordance with the MCHP, and to track performance as required of the MCHP. We encourage you to contact our complaints standards staff for any advice and guidance by phone 0131 297 4814 or email [csa@sps.gov.scot](mailto:csa@sps.gov.scot).

### Call for professional advisers

We are currently seeking professional advisers (consultants and senior professionals with appropriate qualifications and experience) to provide specialist advice on our casework in the following areas:

- Social work
- Acute medicine
- Psychiatry
- Child and adolescent psychiatry

We are particularly keen to hear from social workers working in children and families. For more information, please contact our lead adviser Dorothy Armstrong at [dorothy.armstrong@sps.gov.scot](mailto:dorothy.armstrong@sps.gov.scot).

## Invitation to tender for legal services

We are inviting tenders for the provision of legal services for the SPSO. The deadline for submissions is 17:00 on Tuesday 27 April 2021.

[Please see our website for more information.](#)

## COVID-19 information

As lockdown restrictions are starting to be lifted, our office remains closed and our service provision is not changing.

Please read our [website for more service information](#), such as operating hours of our Freephone advice line.

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For further information contact:

### **Communications team**

Tel: 0131 240 2990

Email: [communications@sps.gov.scot](mailto:communications@sps.gov.scot)

### **SPSO Assessment and Guidance team**

Tel: 0800 377 7330

Email: [www.sps.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.sps.org.uk/contact-us)

Website: [www.sps.org.uk](http://www.sps.org.uk)