

## October 2021

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## Our findings

### Complaints

This month we:

- published 23 decision reports available [here](#)
- upheld 12 complaints in full or part
- made 28 recommendations for learning and improvement.

### *Decision reports: learning points*

This month we are publishing two cases relating to a lack of investigation into the cause of patient's symptoms:

- [202001654](#) – we found that a health board failed to provide a patient with reasonable care and treatment during two short admissions to hospital. We considered that the board failed to fully investigate the cause of bleeding and the patient's thickened bladder, and that not enough regard was given to their deterioration. These failings led to a delayed diagnosis of cancer; however, we acknowledged that these did not impact on the patient's ultimate prognosis.

We asked the board to apologise and ensure staff understand fully the importance of taking into account the patient's medical history, accurately report on previous test results, and that symptoms are fully investigated.

- [202003625](#) – we found that a health board failed to provide a patient with appropriate care and treatment following numerous admissions to hospital. We considered that there was a lack of investigation of low blood pressure and no evidence of a cardiology input. We also noted that the care and management of the patient's hernia was below standard and there was a delay in involving other specialists.

We asked the board to apologise, ensure there is a policy in place for management of emergency cases and prioritisation, and that ward documentation reflects concerns and management plans clearly.

## Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

### *Statistics*

During September we:

- responded to 89 enquiries
- made 68 decisions
  - 4 community care grants
  - 40 crisis grants
  - 24 self-isolation support grants
- upheld three (75%) community care grants, seven (18%) crisis grants and ten (42%) self-isolation support grants
- signposted an additional 75 applicants to other sources of assistance. Six 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. Six applicants noted that they had accessibility issues relating to contacting the council as there was no Freephone number in place or problems with the telephone number. We received three enquiries from councils seeking advice and two were signposted to other organisations.

### *Case studies*

C applied for a Self-Isolation Support Grant as they had been required to self-isolate via the Test and Protect service. C was unable to work from home therefore they experienced a reduction in their income as they were only paid Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

The council refused the application initially as C did not provide evidence that they had experienced a loss of income. The council also checked HMRC records which confirmed this. C requested a first tier review and provided a pay slip which confirmed that they were paid SSP. The council checked with HMRC who noted that their records had been amended and C had experienced a reduced income. Despite this, the council did not change the decision as they said that C was employed by a family member and they deemed that the payslip had been changed.

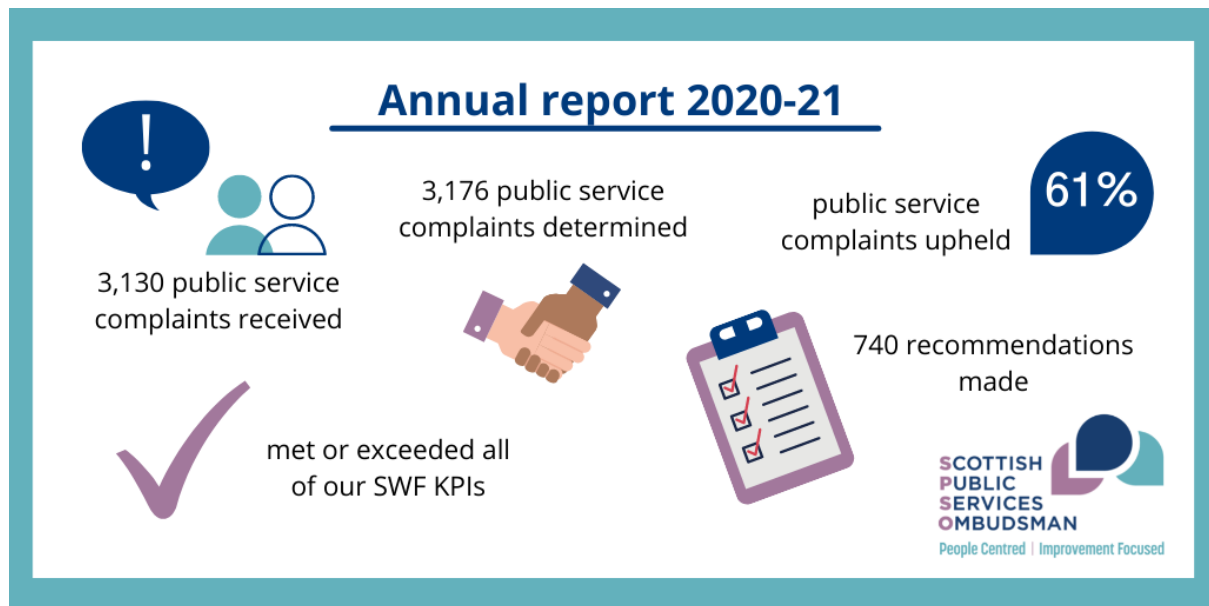
C submitted an independent review request. We requested the council's file and contacted the applicant for further information. C provided a pay slip confirming they only received SSP during their period of self-isolation. We were satisfied that in line with section 11.25 of the SWF guidance, this was sufficient and that C had experienced a reduction in their income. We deemed there were no inconsistencies

in what C told us and had no reason not to take this information at face value. We deemed that C met all of the remaining eligibility criteria and so changed the council's decision. We provided feedback that the council had incorrectly assessed the available information.

Further examples can be found in the searchable directory [on our website](#) under the title 'Self-Isolation Support Grant'.

## Annual report 2020-21

On Tuesday 19 October, we published our 2020-21 annual report. Some highlights include:



The Ombudsman, Rosemary Agnew, said:

*"To say 2020-21 was a challenging year is an understatement. Being subject to lockdown restrictions had a significant impact on everyone; complainants, Scottish public bodies and us. Significant does not necessarily mean negative... If I could sum-up SPSO's performance in one statement, it is this: We performed well in the face of adversity, never lost sight of our values, duties or commitments, and discovered innovative new talents we never knew we had."*

[The full report can be viewed online here.](#)

**We are hiring!**



## Complaints Reviewers

[www.spsso.org.uk/working-for-us](http://www.spsso.org.uk/working-for-us)



## VACANCIES

We are recruiting **Complaints Reviewers**.

Our Complaints Reviewers play a key role in our work, investigating, analysing, resolving and deciding complaints across a wide range of sectors including councils, NHS, housing associations, most water and sewerage providers, the Scottish Government and its agencies and departments, colleges and universities, prisons, and most Scottish public bodies.

These vacancies close at **1pm on Wednesday 3 November 2021**.

If you are interested in keeping up to date with our latest news and vacancies in the future, please follow our [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#) account where we post regular updates.

[Click here for further details and how to apply for these roles.](#)

### Call for professional advisers

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

- General psychiatrists (including CAMHs)
- Child and adolescents psychiatrists
- Acute medicine physicians
- Respiratory physicians

For more information, please contact our lead adviser Dorothy Armstrong at [dorothy.armstrong@spsso.gov.scot](mailto:dorothy.armstrong@spsso.gov.scot).

## Independent National Whistleblowing Officer webinars

The second of our Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO) webinars 'Good practice in receiving concerns' is now available to watch online. Thank you to all who attended. If you have any feedback or further questions, please email [INWO@spsso.gov.scot](mailto:INWO@spsso.gov.scot). This webinar, along with our first webinar 'Role of the confidential contact', is available [on our website](#).



### *INWO e-bulletins*

Our INWO team sends out regular updates with further information about the service. [Our October 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](#).

## COVID-19 information

### *SPSO*

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.

### *Public bodies*

We are mindful that the pressures of the pandemic are affecting all of us, and that front-line complaint handling is challenging. Complaints are very important as they are one of the ways that service users can make their voice heard, especially when other communication routes may not be open to them. In this context it is important that public bodies resource and maintain their complaint handling functions.

We recognise that timescales are challenging and would remind everyone that stage 2 can be extended, but you should keep complainers informed.

We recently wrote to the CEOs of public bodies reminding them of complaint handling duties and things they can do to maintain the service, such as trying to resolve complaints and triaging so important issues don't get missed.

[The letter is available to view here](#). Previously issued letters and guidance are available on our ['COVID-19 update for public service organisations' page](#).

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For further information contact:

**Communications team**

Tel: 0131 240 2990

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

**SPSO Assessment and Guidance team**

Tel: 0800 377 7330

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

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