

March 2022

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Our findings

Complaints

This month we:

- published 15 decision reports available [here](#)
- upheld 11 complaints in full or part
- made 36 recommendations for learning and improvement.

Investigation reports

In addition to our decision summaries, we are also publishing two detailed investigation reports about the water provider Water Plus: [201903280](#) and [201908445](#). We found that both complainants experienced a level of customer service that is below the standard expected of a licenced provider in the Scottish water market. We found that:

- significant system and process issues led to inaccurate bills over prolonged periods of time
- their handling of the customer complaints was characterised by delays, inaccuracies and confusion
- they were unable or unwilling to provide the SPSO with complete and full records despite multiple requests
- they failed to explain the nature of their relationship with their partner organisations, or whether delays in payments being processed had been fully investigated

We have asked Water Plus to apologise to both customers and arrange for two independent audits in relation to their sales practices and billing processes for the Scottish Market.

Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

Statistics

During February we:

- responded to 159 enquiries
- made 126 decisions
 - 8 community care grants
 - 70 crisis grants
 - 48 self-isolation support grants
- upheld four (50%) community care grants, eight (11%) crisis grants and 18 (38%) self-isolation support grants
- signposted an additional 172 applicants to other sources of assistance throughout the month. This is a significant decrease from the previous month when we signposted 471 applicants. Mid-way through the month of February we introduced interactive voice response phone options to guide applicants to the correct telephone number more effectively. This appears to be having the impact of making signposting for those contacting us in error, more effective with fewer calls having to be taken by the team
- responded to three enquiries from councils seeking advice.

As reported last month, the volume of self-isolation support grant and crisis grant review requests has risen significantly over the past few months. They remained high in February. We are in consultation with Scottish Government about the increase in demand and the impact that this is having on our capacity and service delivery.

Case studies

While community care grants have fallen, of the small number of requests received, a number have been useful for learning. In one example, the applicant (C) requested an independent review of the council's decision on their community care grant application. C had moved to a bigger property, partly to help them gain overnight access to their children who were in kinship care.

The council assessed that C did not meet any of the qualifying criteria and therefore were unable to make an award. They noted that social work confirmed that overnight access was not being given and therefore there was no plans for C's children to be returned. C requested a first tier review but the council did not change their decision.

We reviewed the council's file and contacted C and their social worker for further information. C's social worker confirmed that while there was no timescale set for C to regain custody of their children, overnight access had been agreed but had been taking place at another location due to the condition of the property. The social worker stated that carpets would help create a warmer and more comfortable environment for the children on their overnight visits. On the basis of this information we disagreed that the application did not meet the qualifying conditions associated

with exceptional pressure. We changed the council's decision and instructed them to award carpets for the living room and two bedrooms. We provided feedback that the council appear to have confused the information provided by social work with respect to whether custody or overnight access arrangements had been agreed. While custody had not been agreed, C had been granted overnight access and we deemed this to be relevant.

Further examples can be found in the searchable directory [on our website](#).

Model Complaints Handling Procedures - Key Performance Indicators

We recently wrote to public bodies to share our refreshed Key Performance Indicator (KPI) guidance for the Model Complaints Handling Procedures (MCHPs). Thank you to our wider stakeholders and organisations who engaged with us around the production of this guidance and provided helpful feedback. This guidance will support organisations in evaluating their own performance, driving improvement and sharing good practice.



The [published guidance](#) and [accompanying cover letter](#) issued to organisations can be found [on our website](#).

Our Improvement, Standards and Engagement team continue to work with public service providers to improve standards of complaints handling, you can contact us with any queries via csa@sps.gov.scot.

Signposting to the SPSO

It has come to our attention that some organisations may be advertising the incorrect mailing information for the SPSO. The current and correct address for the SPSO is:

SPSO
Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh EH7 4NS

We also have a Freepost option: **Freepost SPSO**. This is all that needs to be written on the envelope (no street name, no postcode) and no stamp is required.

We kindly ask any organisation signposting to SPSO using our old address, to update their communications material to reflect the correct address. This ensures that our service remains accessible and all mail reaches us as quickly as possible.

We are happy to provide complainants with Freepost envelopes on request.

Independent National Whistleblowing Officer

Following the success of our union rep webinar, we will be holding a second session on **Thursday 31 March 2022, from 14:00 – 16:00**.

Once again, we will be talking about the role of union reps in supporting their members during the whistleblowing process. The first hour will be similar to the previous webinar, the **second hour will be a Q&A session**. Any union rep who was at the first session is welcome to join us at 15:00 for the Q&A.

If you are coming to the webinar please review our [overview of how to raise concerns using the process in the Standards](#), which will provide helpful context for our more detailed presentation at the webinar.

To register your interest please email INWO@spsso.gov.scot.



INWO e-bulletins

Our INWO team sends out regular updates with further information about the service. [Our March 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

As lockdown restrictions have not been lifted fully, our office remains closed to visitors. Our service provision is not changing, with most of our staff continuing to work from home.

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

For further information contact:

Communications team

Tel: 0131 240 2990

Email: communications@spsso.gov.scot

SPSO Assessment and Guidance team

Tel: 0800 377 7330

Email: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us

Website: www.spsso.org.uk