

February 2022

In this month's e-newsletter:

- Our findings this month
 - Complaints
 - Scottish Welfare Fund reviews
- We are hiring!
- Independent National Whistleblowing Officer
- COVID-19 information

Our findings

Complaints

This month we:

- published 15 decision reports available [here](#)
- upheld nine complaints in full or part
- made 22 recommendations for learning and improvement.

Decision reports: learning points

This month we are publishing two cases relating to the assessment and discharge of patients:

- [202103259](#) – we found that a health board failed to provide a patient with reasonable care and treatment after they were allowed to discharge themselves against medical advice. We considered that the patient's capacity should have been formally assessed when they were noted to be agitated and confused. When they expressed a wish to be discharged, a senior doctor should have reviewed their decision-making capacity.

We asked the board to apologise and ensure a patient's capacity is kept under review.

- [201910934](#) – we found that a health board failed to carry out a comprehensive geriatric assessment during a patient's admission to hospital. We also noted that no multidisciplinary team (MDT) meeting was held prior to the patient's discharge. If this had taken place, the MDT could have considered the possible benefit of further rehabilitation.

We asked the board to apologise to the patient's family and ensure older patients have prompt access to comprehensive geriatric assessments in line with Healthcare Improvement Scotland standards.

Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

Statistics

During January we:

- responded to 156 enquiries
- made 118 decisions
 - 14 community care grants
 - 54 crisis grants
 - 50 self-isolation support grants
- upheld seven (50%) community care grants, 12 (22%) crisis grants and 21 (42%) self-isolation support grants
- signposted an additional 471 applicants to other sources of assistance which is a significant increase from previous months. The majority (365) of these were calling us instead of their local council in error. A number of applicants told us that they had accessibility issues getting in touch with their local council such there being no Freephone number or being unable to get through due to the lines being busy. The remaining applicants were either signposted to a separate organisation or were contacting us too early in the process to request a review and were advised accordingly. We would remind council's that it is good practice to have a Freephone number.
- introduced some interactive voice response options to our phone line to try and guide applicants to the correct telephone number more effectively
- responded to nine enquiries from councils seeking advice

Case studies

We saw significant increases in the volume of applications for reviews of self-isolation support grants in January. The number of applications for reviews of crisis grants also increased in comparison to previous months, with several applicants making reference to the cost of living increases. In a number of these cases we assessed that the council should have made further enquiries before making their decision.

In one such case, the applicant (C) asked for an independent review of the council's decision. C had applied for a crisis grant as they had recently been subject to benefit sanctions. As a result of this, C had no money to cover their essential living costs.

The council declined the application on the basis that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) advised that C had not been subject to benefit sanctions, but had earnings and this was why their Universal Credit (UC) payment was zero. The council did not change their decision as a result of C's first tier review request.

We reviewed the council's case file and spoke with C for further information. We disagreed with the council's assessment that the applicant was not eligible. C told us that they had benefit sanctions in November and December and earnings in January which had been spent. We checked with the DWP who confirmed this. We deemed

C was eligible for a grant, met the qualifying conditions and the necessary priority level. As such, we upheld C's review request and instructed the council to make a payment. We provided feedback to the council about their decision-making as we assessed that they did not make sufficient enquiries with the applicant and based their decision purely on information from the DWP.

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

We are hiring!

A circular graphic with a decorative border of small, colorful teardrop shapes. Inside the circle, there is a logo consisting of a dark blue circle and a teal shape. To the right of the logo, the word "VACANCIES" is written in bold, dark blue capital letters. Below the logo, the text "Complaints Reviewer x 7" is written in bold, dark blue. Underneath that, the closing date and time are listed: "Closing Wednesday 23 February 2022, 5pm". At the bottom right of the graphic, the website address "www.spsa.org.uk/working-for-us" is written in small, dark blue text.

VACANCIES

Complaints Reviewer x 7

Closing Wednesday 23 February 2022,
5pm

www.spsa.org.uk/working-for-us

We are recruiting **Complaints Reviewers**, reflecting the high volumes of complaints we are experiencing and the impact of the pandemic on our service.

Our Complaints Reviewers play a key role in our work, analysing and resolving 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 **5pm Wednesday 23 February 2022**.

[Visit our website for further details and how to apply for these roles.](#)

Independent National Whistleblowing Officer

Webinars for union reps

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**

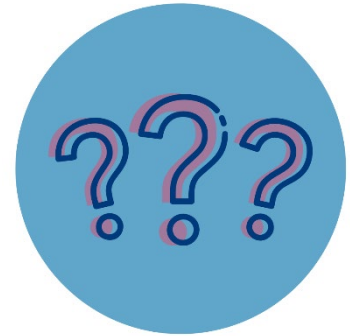
session. Any union rep who was at the first session is welcome to join us at 15:00 for the Q&A.

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

New Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Our FAQs have been updated and provide a wide range of useful information and guidance for both [whistleblowers](#) and [people handling concerns](#).

We will continue to add FAQs as they arise. If you have any feedback or have other questions please let us know at INWO@spsso.gov.scot.



INWO e-bulletins

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