

July 2022

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Our findings

Public service complaints

This month we:

- published 16 decision reports available [here](#)
- upheld three complaints in full or part
- made eight recommendations for learning and improvement.

Decision reports: Learning points

This month we highlight the importance of good complaints handling. In case [202108353](#) we upheld a complaint from a patient after the health board suggested that there was an emerging pattern of the patient making unfounded complaints. We referred to Patient Rights legislation that ensures the rights of patients to complain or give feedback about their healthcare encounters and asked the board to apologise for failing to handle their complaint reasonably.

Complaints are valuable feedback and an important way of communicating and building relationships with service users. We appreciate that people who raise complaints may already be feeling frustrated, angry or distressed before complaining. This can often lead to difficult conversations and organisations may find the way people are complaining challenging. Our [Complaints handling practice guide](#) aims to support organisations and their staff in these situations, ensuring we balance the rights of all involved. Empowering staff to proactively manage relationships and de-escalate distressing situations can help us meet the needs of those whose situation means they may act in ways others find difficult to understand.

We encourage organisations to visit the [support and guidance section of our website](#) where we have a number of helpful resources around complaints handling and communication with customers. Our [Standards team](#) are also available for advice on complaints standards or complaints handling in your organisation.

Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

Statistics

During June we:

- received 131 requests for review
- made 104 decisions
 - 13 community care grants
 - 51 crisis grants
 - 40 self-isolation support grants
- upheld four (31%) community care grants, ten (20%) crisis grants and 19 (48%) self-isolation support grants
- signposted an additional 100 applicants to other sources of assistance. A high proportion of these contacts were calling us instead of their local council in error. Others reported accessibility issues including a lack of Freephone number or difficulties getting through. We signposted six applicants to other organisations including the DWP and Social Security Scotland.

Case studies

In recent weeks we have determined a number of cases where we deemed that the council should have made further enquiries to arrive at a robust and reasonable decision.

In one such case, the applicant (C) had applied for a community care grant for help with removal costs. C had moved home due to their child being bullied at school and within the community. The council declined the application on the basis that C had already moved into the property by the time they had made their decision and could not make a payment retrospectively. C had applied in advance of the move, but had been unable to provide a copy of their tenancy agreement to the council at the time. C requested a first tier review but the council did not change their decision.

We reviewed the council's case file and spoke with C about their situation. They told us that the move took place as part of a mutual exchange of tenancies and that they did not receive the new tenancy agreement until the day after they had moved. We confirmed this with their housing officer.

We disagreed with the council's approach as C's new tenancy could have been confirmed by contacting the housing department. We were satisfied that C had provided the necessary information and that the invoice had only become a debt as the council had declined the award without a tenancy agreement. As such, we changed the council's decision and instructed them to pay the applicant's removal costs invoice.

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

Child Friendly Complaints

The SPSO is being funded by the Scottish Government to develop a child-friendly way for public bodies to handle complaints. On 25 April 2022 we launched our two-year project to develop and implement new guidance for the public bodies we work with.

It is important that complaints handling processes both enable children and young people to exercise their rights, and ensure those handling complaints hear and respect children and young peoples' views and voices. Taking a co-design approach that hears those voices from the outset will help ensure young people have a real impact in shaping the new guidance.

We will be running design workshops with a wide range of people over the next few months. If you would like to take part in our workshops, or if you have any questions about the project, please contact us by emailing CSA@sps.gov.scot.

Call for professional advisers

We are currently recruiting professional advisers for the SPSO register. We are seeking experienced clinicians in the following areas:

- General practice
- Gynaecology
- Obstetrics
- Gastroenterology

Clinicians who would like to find out more can contact our lead adviser, Dorothy Armstrong, at dorothy.armstrong@sps.gov.scot. We encourage you to call and chat with Dorothy who can explain what it means to be an adviser to the SPSO. She can also tell you about wider benefits such as contributing to NHS learning and improvement, identifying good practice, helping individual patients get access to justice and how it is an excellent opportunity for personal professional development.

Independent National Whistleblowing Officer

Speak Up Week 3 to 7 October 2022

Our INWO team will be holding their first major stakeholder event later this year: **Speak Up Week**, which will run from 3 to 7 October 2022.

Speak Up Week will be a great opportunity for everyone involved in the NHS whistleblowing process in Scotland to raise the profile of speaking up. All boards will have a chance to showcase to their own staff and others what they are doing and the positive outcomes that can derive from having a good speak up culture.

We will be running a webinar/ information session on 26 July 2022 between 14:00-15:00 for anyone who is interested in getting involved. Please email INWO@spsso.gov.scot to register. The webinar will be recorded and will be available afterwards on the INWO website, where we will also share resources and publicity materials.



INWO e-bulletins

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

We are currently working under hybrid working arrangements. We are accepting visitors by appointment only.

Our Freephone advice line is also open four hours a day:

Monday	9 am – 1 pm
Tuesday	1 pm – 5 pm
Wednesday	9 am – 1 pm
Thursday	1 pm – 5 pm
Friday	9 am – 1 pm

Our Assessment & Guidance team are available to answer general enquiries or for advice on how to make a complaint. Calls outside of these hours can be arranged by appointment. For more information, please see our website: [Contact us | SPSO.](#)



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