

January 2023

We hope you had an enjoyable and relaxing festive period.

In this month's e-newsletter:

- Our findings this month
 - Public service complaints
 - Scottish Welfare Fund reviews
- SPSO updated training launch
- We are hiring!
- Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO)

Our findings

Public service complaints

This month we

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

Decision reports: learning points

This month we highlight the importance of **openness** and **clarity** in the complaints handling process:

- [202001327](#) – we found that the health board failed to explain to a patient why their request for a meeting was denied. The patient complained to the board about their care and treatment following multiple surgeries but was asked to submit their complaint in writing and a meeting was refused. While we found the board's reasons to request a complaint in writing to be reasonable, this was not explained clearly to the complainant.

We asked the board to apologise and ensure that patients' individual needs are considered when they make a complaint.

- [202008542](#) – we found that the council failed to respond to a complainant who raised concerns regarding the way the council had handled their medical

examination which they were required to attend to determine their fitness to drive. The complainant was advised the matter would be investigated internally but no further response was received despite their requests for further updates.

We asked the council to apologise and ensure that complaints are accurately identified and handled in line with the complaints handling procedure.

Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

Statistics

During December we

- responded to 97 enquiries
- made 84 decisions
 - 20 community care grants
 - 64 crisis grants
- upheld 65% of community care grants and 20% of crisis grants
- signposted an additional 94 applicants to other sources of assistance. Some applicants noted that they had accessibility issues relating to contacting the council as there was no Freephone number in place
- received eight calls from councils seeking advice.

Support and Intervention Policy

We raised two new SWF related issues in line with our [Support and Intervention Policy](#). The first of these was raised at level two of the policy, as we had previously raised that insufficient enquiries were being made prior to making a decision and we observed a further instance of this. The second issue was raised at level one, and concerned using outdated information about the assessment of applications during the COVID-19 pandemic, and incorrect signposting information for SPSO in decision letters.

Case studies

C asked for an independent review of the council's decision. They applied for a crisis grant due to spending their available income on bills and paying back debts which left them without funds for food, gas and electricity.

The council declined the initial application because C had received three awards in the last 12 months. Upon checking C's application history, the council observed that C had applied under similar circumstances before. As such, they declined a further award on the grounds that although there was no fault on the part of C, the circumstances were not exceptional. C requested a first tier review of the decision but the decision was not changed.

We reviewed the council's case file and spoke with C for further information about their circumstances. C confirmed that they were in crisis due to paying debts to friends and on their utility meters. They also advised that they were struggling to manage due to the cost of living increases. As C had previously been awarded due to paying bills and debts, we agreed with the council's assessment that the circumstances were not exceptional. Additionally, while we acknowledged the impact

of cost of living increases, this affects all households regardless of income and cannot be considered to be exceptional. We did not change the council's decision but provided feedback regarding timescales for issuing first tier review decisions.

For further case studies please see the [searchable directory on our website](#).



On Monday 9 January 2023 we launched our new SPSO online training courses!
You can now register for:

- **Good Complaints Handling** – a self-guided course aimed at staff handling complaints at stage 1 of the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) or anyone involved in complaint handling looking to develop their knowledge.
- **Complaints Investigation Skills** – a trainer led course aimed at staff who investigate complaints at stage 2 of the MCHP.

Visit our [training page](#) for available dates, prices and more information on what you can expect from each course!



We are recruiting for an **Assessment & Guidance Officer**.

The post-holder will play a pivotal role in handling incoming enquiries and providing relevant, up to date information and advice on the SPSO to all stakeholders.

Please note that this vacancy closes shortly at 14:00 on Friday 20 January 2023

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.](#)

Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO)

Speak Up Week: Hold the date 2-6 October 2023

We are delighted to announce that Speak Up Week will be back in early October. Our INWO team are looking forward to working with health boards to make this a success. If you're looking for a bit of inspiration, we've put together a [list of activities that took place during Speak Up Week 2022 and further links and resources](#).

We will be holding a webinar later in the year to share ideas and resources. In the meantime we would be keen to hear from boards about any themes for Speak Up Week that would be particularly helpful. Please email INWO@spsso.gov.scot with any comments or suggestions.



INWO e-bulletins

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

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

For further information contact:

Communications team

Tel: 0131 240 2990

Email: communications@sps.gov.scot

SPSO Assessment and Guidance team

Tel: 0800 377 7330

Email: www.sps.gov.uk/contact-us

Website: www.sps.gov.uk