

SPSO decision report

Case: 201104070, Scottish Water
Sector: water
Subject: sewer flooding - external
Outcome: some upheld, action taken by body to remedy, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about Scottish Water's response when there was sewage flooding outside his home.

Our investigation found that there had been problems with a sewage pumping station that had contributed to the flooding outside Mr C's home. In response to this, Scottish Water had installed new bigger pumps, lowered the pump start level and installed an emergency overflow at the pumping station. However, there was further flooding outside Mr C's property even after this work was carried out because a temporary bung (stopper) that Scottish Water had installed was washed down the sewer. They fitted a new bung and concrete was put in to stop this from happening again. This helped to reduce the risk of flooding.

We established that where Scottish Water can resolve the cause of flooding outside someone's home, either without additional investment or through operational measures (jetting, cleaning etc), they will do so. However, they are not funded for capital solutions to resolve hydraulic capacity issues that cause external flooding. In this case, we found that Scottish Water had taken reasonable steps to investigate and to try to resolve the problem. Although not all of these steps were successful, we considered that their actions had been reasonable. They had also awarded Mr C financial compensation for the problems he had faced.

Mr C was also unhappy with the way that Scottish Water dealt with his complaints about the matter. We identified a number of failings in relation to their complaints handling. There was no evidence that they responded to one of his letters. Another letter they sent did not clearly explain that it was in response to a number of pieces of correspondence received from him, and they failed to respond to some of Mr C's complaints within the appropriate timescale.

Mr C also complained that staff refused to provide their business cards to him. Scottish Water said that they had investigated this and that staff did offer him their contact details. Although it is good practice for members of staff to be able to provide business cards at a meeting, we considered that it was reasonable for staff to offer their contact details if they were unable to provide business cards. However, we found that staff had failed to keep adequate records of their meetings with Mr C. Mr C also complained that staff had failed to honour commitments made to him. We did not find any evidence that this was the case.

Recommendations

We recommended that Scottish Water:

- consider awarding Mr C further guaranteed service standard payments in line with their code of practice for the delays in responding to his complaints;
- remind relevant staff that they should make adequate records of meetings with service users; and
- issue a written apology to Mr C for the failings identified in relation to the handling of his complaints.