

Case: 201104352, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Sector: local government
Subject: property and accommodation/school courses
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C is a solicitor acting on behalf of his client (Mr A). Mr C complained about the way the council handled Mr A's request for a travel allowance for his son to attend school by car.

The journey to Mr A's son's school took an hour and fifteen minutes. The council explained that their policy stated that when the journey to school exceeded an hour, lodgings would be made available. However, they added that there had not been demand for this for a number of years and that the list of approved accommodation was probably no longer in operation. This advice led Mr A to apply for a mileage allowance. His request was refused by the council. The council were also unable to provide accommodation, and said that Mr A's request for mileage was contrary to the council's policy. The situation continued like this for almost two years, when Mr A was offered a mileage allowance.

Mr C complained that the council failed to provide lodgings for Mr A's son and delayed in dealing with his applications for lodgings and mileage allowance. He further complained about the council's complaints handling.

Our investigation found that although the council had a policy to provide accommodation in these circumstances, they did not do so. They also failed to provide a viable alternative solution until much later. It was also apparent from the available documentation that the council did not deal with the complaint in accordance with their policy as there were delays in responding. We upheld both Mr C's complaints and made recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- apologise for their failure to provide lodgings;
- backdate the mileage payment;

- apologise for their delay in dealing with applications for lodgings and mileage allowance;
- apologise for their delay in responding to the complaint; and
- emphasise to those staff concerned the importance of adhering to the stated complaints policy.