

SPSO decision report

Case: 201202237, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
Sector: local government
Subject: policy/administration
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mrs C lives in an area served by a passenger ferry service. Mrs C and a number of other users were concerned about the re-tendering exercise for this service. This was carried out by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) who were responsible for subsidising the service. Mrs C complained that SPT failed to provide adequate specification in the tender documents that the vessel to be deployed should be of modern public transport quality, and awarded the contract to the successful bidder primarily with regard to savings in costs and not on passenger safety and comfort. She also said that SPT had not fully responded to questions that she and others raised.

We did not uphold Mrs C's complaints. Our investigation found that the tender documents had specified a size and class of vessel, and required that the vessel deployed should be licensed by the Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA) for safety and seaworthiness purposes. The successful bidder was not required to supply a new or modern vessel. The incumbent operators, who had been using a vessel built in 2007, were unsuccessful in their bid by a substantial margin. We also noted that the award of the contract had been examined separately by Audit Scotland, who had made no criticism of SPT's procurement process.

In response to considerable public interest in the tendering process, SPT had published a question and answer sheet, and had updated this when further questions arose. On balance, we did not uphold this complaint as we found that only two of the six specific questions raised by Mrs C in her correspondence had not received an answer. This was because one was treated as a comment because of the way Mrs C had written it, and the other was a matter for the MCA rather than SPT.