

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203102, Dumfries and Galloway Council
Sector: local government
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about the way in which the council handled his complaint about a planning matter. We found that the council failed to deal with the subject of his complaint at the earlier stages of the complaints procedure. When they did finally respond to the matter he was complaining about, they acknowledged some, but not all, of their failings and apologised to Mr C for them. However, in later correspondence, the council appeared to change their position and said that they regarded the first stage response to the complaint as their final response on the matter.

We concluded that the council's handling of this matter was confusing and of poor quality, and upheld Mr C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- apologise to Mr C for the poor handling of his complaint, and for not acknowledging their failings in dealing with it;
- feed back to the planning department that they should acknowledge incoming emails, and clearly explain why they might not provide a response to the substance of an email; and
- review how this matter has been dealt with, in order to learn lessons in identifying the substance of a complaint and providing appropriate explanations and apologies in complaint responses at the earliest opportunity.