

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203541, A Housing Association
Sector: housing associations
Subject: improvements and renovation
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

One of Mr C's children is severely disabled, and the family home was not suitable for his family's needs. He had for several years been awaiting the offer of a suitable house. When local builders submitted planning applications for part of a new housing association development, Mr C's child was twice assessed by a council occupational therapist for the adaptations that would be needed for one of the new houses to meet their specific needs. These adaptations were to be funded by the council and would be communicated in a particular design brief to the builders. Mr C was provided with a copy of the then current plans, which showed the proposed house to be detached. Mr C attended a meeting with the association in the late summer of 2010, and in response to queries he raised in email correspondence was informed that several of the points could be postponed to a subsequent detailed design stage. After planning consent was given for the development, the plans were amended without further consultation with Mr C or the council's occupational therapist. When Mr C saw the amended plans, he said that these showed a semi-detached house and that there were other significant differences in the proposals.

Mr C made two complaints - firstly that the association unreasonably altered the plans, and that this meant that the house would not meet his child's needs; and secondly that the association failed to inform him or consult with him about the amended plans. We did not uphold Mr C's first complaint as there was no unequivocal evidence that the association had instructed the amendments. When they learned that changes had been made, they had rectified matters by instructing further changes to ensure that the house, when completed, would meet Mr C's child's needs. The association agreed, however, that there had been a breakdown of communication with Mr C and so we upheld that complaint and made a recommendation.

Recommendations

We recommended that the association:

- liaise with relevant senior officers in the health partnership now responsible for Occupational Therapy input, to look into the issues of communication in this case to better identify the specification of needs in new build projects and to manage family expectations.