

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203871, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: health
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C's husband collapsed at home and an emergency ambulance was called. Although Mrs C lives near an ambulance station and a hospital, the ambulance sent was not the nearest one at the time, and there was a delay before it arrived. Mrs C's husband later died from a heart attack. The service explained to her that the nearest ambulance was already involved with a patient, and so the next available vehicle was despatched. Mrs C complained to us that the service had not conducted a thorough investigation into what had happened, and that, after she complained to them, it was five months before she received a final response.

Our investigation found that the service had completed a thorough investigation, so we did not uphold that complaint. We did, however, uphold her complaint about the complaints handling, as the board had not sent her regular updates on the progress of the investigation or told her that she could contact us, when the response to her complaint was delayed. We also established that they incorrectly told Mrs C that the investigation was nearing completion, when in fact it had been concluded.

Recommendations

We recommended that the service:

- conduct a review into the time taken to respond to formal complaints; and
- apologise to Mrs C for the time taken to respond to her complaint.