

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201204673, Renfrewshire Council  
**Sector:** local government  
**Subject:** council tax  
**Outcome:** some upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Miss C, who lived with her partner, complained when she unexpectedly received a retrospective bill for council tax when the council removed a single occupancy discount from the account. Miss C said the council should not have applied a single occupancy discount when her partner had not applied for it. She said the council should have known that he was no longer a single occupant because he was a council tenant and they had attended the council's housing office together to enter into a joint tenancy. Miss C complained because she said that when they went to the council an officer had told them that they did not have to do anything more, and that their rent and council tax payments would stay the same. Miss C also complained that she had been caused a great deal of frustration by the council's poor handling of her initial enquiry and complaint.

The council said they could not be sure what advice was given to Miss C and her partner when they went to the council office to sign the new tenancy agreement. They said there was no agreement in place to exchange information between the housing team and the revenues team administering council tax. They said that they would consider whether such an agreement would be useful in future.

We did not uphold Miss C's complaint. Our investigation found that the council sent revised council tax notices after the joint tenancy had been entered into, as well as a new council tax notice at the start of each new financial year. These clearly indicated that a discount had been applied on the basis of sole occupancy. This was clearly incorrect and Miss C and her partner should have brought this to the attention of the council.

We did, however, find shortcomings in the council's handling of Miss C's initial enquiries and complaint. Officers had not taken ownership of the issues, and unreasonably referred Miss C back to the council's contact centre when it was clear she was dissatisfied and had a complaint. The contact centre had not passed details of Miss C's enquiries to the relevant officers. In responding to our investigation, the council themselves identified a number of shortcomings in their handling of the matter and said they were taking steps to establish what improvements could be made in light of Miss C's complaints to avoid this happening again.