

SPSO decision report

Case: 201204783, A Housing Association
Sector: housing associations
Subject: communication staff attitude dignity and confidentiality
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C's son (Mr A) had died, leaving a widow and young family. Mr A and his widow were tenants of the housing association. After Mr A died, Mr C handled matters, including contacting the association within days of his son's death. Mr C complained that the rental direct debit was taken for the following two months, despite Mr C having been assured that it had been cancelled. In addition, representatives of the association visited the property with paperwork that was still in joint names, inappropriate rent reminder letters were sent and correspondence continued to be issued in joint names. This was already a very difficult time for Mr C and his family and he told us that this added unnecessarily to their upset and distress. Mr C complained that the association, on being told of his son's death, did not internally communicate this appropriately to staff. He also felt that they should have had a specific policy in place to handle such matters.

We upheld Mr C's complaint that the association's internal communication had failed. The association had explained that the local housing officer who would normally have handled such matters had left her post suddenly. We noted that Mr C had taken this into account and had contacted the housing association directly, rather than trying to do so through that officer. We noted that the association had apologised for and explained their mistakes, and had offered some redress to Mr A's widow. Having considered all the evidence and taken account of the fact that the retired officer was soon to be replaced, we did not uphold his complaint that they should have a specific policy in place.

Recommendations

We recommended that the association:

- confirm that a replacement housing officer is in place; and
- confirm that steps will be taken to ensure that bereavements are communicated more effectively.