

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201300186, The City of Edinburgh Council  
**Sector:** local government  
**Subject:** council tax  
**Outcome:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Miss C and her partner are in receipt of council tax benefit. The council notified Miss C that she had council tax arrears from three years before of more than £1700, which had to be paid within seven days. When she contacted the council they told her that the arrears had arisen because she and her partner had not told the council about a change in their household income at that time, resulting in an overpayment of council tax benefit. Miss C complained to us about the way the council handled her enquiries. She said that she was not reassured that the council were taking steps to improve their customer services, although they agreed that she had not received an acceptable standard of service. Miss C wanted an assurance that the council were committed to providing a valid, user friendly and reliable service.

We examined the original demand notices issued to Miss C and her partner and found that there had been various changes to the amounts demanded because of changes to their benefit entitlement, but nothing to suggest that the arrears had arisen from an error on the council's part. We were satisfied from our investigation that the council had looked into the matter properly under their complaints procedure, had identified that there had been shortcomings in their customer service, and had made a commitment to improve certain areas. Although some of these changes were not yet in place, we were assured that in the long term the council were committing a significant amount of money to radically improve the ways a customer would be able to access council services. These included more efficient online services and a review of business processes to ensure that they were customer focused. On the understanding that it would be relatively easy to provide further information to the public through the council's website, we asked them to consider taking steps in the short term to provide additional information about the full options available where payment of council tax is outstanding.