

SPSO decision report

Case: 201303023, Orkney Housing Association Ltd
Sector: housing associations
Subject: repairs and maintenance
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained that the association did not provide appropriate information on how to use her heating system. She reported that this led to higher than necessary heating bills. She said that the heating system went wrong on several occasions, and she considered that there was a systematic problem which was not being addressed by the association.

Our investigation reviewed the information given to Mrs C about her heating system, from the manufacturer and the association. The manufacturer visited Mrs C's property three years after she moved in. They did not find a systematic fault but they did provide additional information to Mrs C about the operation of her heating system. They showed her seasonal adjustments which would have reduced her electricity bills. However, the association said that this information was not available at the time Mrs C moved into her tenancy. Given the evidence available in relation to the heating system and the actions of the manufacturer, we considered it likely that the information relating to seasonal adjustments had not been available to the association when Mrs C moved into her property. We concluded that the association provided reasonable information at the start of the tenancy, given the information available to them, but that they could have done more to explore the impact of the lack of information when Mrs C complained.

We were given information about the staff training provided in relation to the operation of Mrs C's heating system. We also noted the involvement of other professionals to fix the heating system at different times, who did not raise any concerns about the overall operation of the heating system. The evidence we saw indicated that maintenance staff had the appropriate skills to maintain Mrs C's central heating system.

We reviewed the evidence in relation to the problems which Mrs C experienced with her heating system, and the actions taken by the association. We reviewed the customer care policy to identify what action they should have taken, and could not find any faults with the association's responses to the problems that arose. They responded promptly and took into account Mrs C's availability when arranging for repairs. All repairs were completed within the expected timescales.

Mrs C also complained about the way her complaint had been handled. She had expected to discuss her complaint with staff before they investigated. We concluded that it would have been in line with their complaints handling procedure to have discussed the complaint prior to an investigation. However, we noted that amendments would be made to the association's complaints handling procedure which would clarify the situation in relation to such discussions in future complaints.

Recommendations

We recommended that the association:

- consider putting a case to the manufacturers of the heating system for compensation for the excess cost of electricity paid by Mrs C as a result of insufficient information from them on the running of the exhaust

air heat pump.