

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201400587, Bridgewater Housing Association Ltd  
**Sector:** housing associations  
**Subject:** policy/administration  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C complained that, although he was awarded backdated housing benefit, the housing association did not refund the overpayment until he wrote to ask about this seven weeks later. He was also unhappy that they continued to take his rent by direct debit for a further month.

We found that the association did not have a procedure in place for instances where a rent account is in credit. They said that, when housing benefit is backdated and a significant overpayment occurs, there is an expectation that housing officers will deal with this quickly. However, this did not happen in Mr C's case.

We found that the association delayed in refunding the overpayment, so we upheld Mr C's complaint. We also upheld his complaint about the further direct debit payment being taken, as we found that there was a delay in notifying the bank that it should be cancelled, due to staff absence.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the association:

- consider implementing a procedure for instances where a rent account is significantly in credit; and
- consider contingency plans for the cancelling of direct debits in the event of the absence of the responsible staff member.