

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201401236, Glasgow City Council  
**Sector:** local government  
**Subject:** council tax  
**Outcome:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C was contacted by the council regarding outstanding council tax arrears in 2009. He began a payment plan with one of the council's debt collection companies (company 1) and continued to pay them until December 2013. In December 2013 Mr C was contacted by another of the council's debt collection companies (company 2). They told him that his arrears were with them and said he needed to set up a payment plan with them.

Mr C contacted the council to confirm that he should pay company 2, rather than company 1 as he had been doing previously. The council responded telling Mr C that his arrears had been passed to company 2 much earlier than December 2013.

Mr C complained that the council had not kept him reasonably informed about where his arrears were and whom he was meant to pay. He also complained that company 1 had not cancelled his original payment plan when his arrears had moved.

Our investigation found that the council could not provide evidence that Mr C had been told about the change of debt collection company from company 1 to company 2. They had also given contradictory information about when Mr C's debt had moved and where to. Because of this, Mr C was not sure whether the council had received all the payments he had made. They also had not followed their complaints handling procedure in responding to his complaint. We upheld Mr C's complaint that the council had not kept him reasonably informed about his arrears and made recommendations to address this.

However, we found that according to the terms of the contract company 1 and company 2 have with the council on collecting arrears, the responsibility to notify the customer of a change in arrangements lies with the new company rather than the old. As such, we did not uphold this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- arrange a meeting with Mr C to clarify what payments have been received and what arrears they have been applied to;
- remind relevant staff of the importance of investigating complaints thoroughly, with regard to all relevant evidence;
- review data sharing agreements with debt collection companies to ensure access to evidence for complaint investigations; and
- apologise to Mr C for the failings identified.