

SPSO decision report

Case: 201407365, East Renfrewshire Council
Sector: local government
Subject: communication staff attitude dignity and confidentiality
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained to the council that she had been forced into a meeting at the end of the school day to discuss her daughter's homework, when she was anxious about collecting another of her children from a different school. She alleged that staff were intimidating and behaved unprofessionally. She also complained about how the school communicated with her. She was dissatisfied with the response she received and complained that her complaints had not been adequately and seriously addressed. Our investigation considered the correspondence between Mrs C and the council and the school, and the council's complaints handling procedure and records of investigation. We found that the council had inappropriately handled her complaint as a first stage in their procedure when more detailed investigation was required of the serious complaints made. There was no evidence that staff had behaved in the way Mrs C alleged and a second investigation addressed the points she had made more comprehensively. The council's final response identified some short-comings in communication and the timings of approach to Mrs C at the end of the school day and we upheld her complaint about how the council had dealt with her complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- apologise for not carrying out a full investigation when the complaint was initially made;
- remind staff of the importance of assessing complaints in terms of the appropriate stage at which they should be handled; and
- consider whether further staff training is required on the principles of good practice in complaints handling.