

SPSO decision report

Case: 201407864, The City of Edinburgh Council
Sector: local government
Subject: statutory notices
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C's property was subject to a statutory notice. When the bill for works was provided, a number of years after the notice was issued and the work undertaken, it was significantly above the estimate. Mr C requested the council provide justifications and itemised bills reflecting the reasons for the cost increases. During correspondence on this matter the council offered to deduct an administration charge, stating that the works were subject to lengthy timescales and poor customer service. Mr C sought clarification of a number of points before accepting the overall offer that this was part of. The council decided that the costs were justified but did not provide the requested justification or itemised bills and withdrew their offer to deduct the administration charge. Mr C complained about the lack of explanation as to the costs for the work and the decision to withdraw the offer to waive the administration fee.

We found that the cost of the project escalated substantially due to a number of emergency notices being served during the works. Whilst many of these costs were deducted from the final account, the overall cost was still significantly higher than the original estimate. We were critical of the council for failing to provide a breakdown of these costs as required by their own guidance. We also concluded that it was inappropriate of the council to withdraw their previous offer to waive the administration fee.

Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- apologise to Mr C for their failure to provide a clear, itemised explanation of the costs for work carried out at his property;
- take steps to ensure they have mechanisms in place to accurately itemise and communicate project costs in line with their guidance;
- reinstate their offer to deduct the administration fee and provide Mr C with a revised cut-off date for acceptance; and
- offer to meet with Mr C to clarify any outstanding points before the cut-off date for accepting their full and final offer.