

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201502182, Fife Council  
**Sector:** local government  
**Subject:** burial grounds/crematoria  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C told us that, in error, the council had opened the grave in which his son was buried. When the family discovered the grave had been disturbed, they contacted the council and were initially told the grave had been dug to the depth of two feet and then filled in. We found that the council had not provided a clear and consistent account as the grave had, in fact, been fully prepared for a burial.

The council explained that the mistake was down to administrative error, in that the wrong section row had been identified by a member of administrative staff. Gravediggers also failed to notice or question why the plaque at the grave did not match the details recorded on their work instruction.

We found the council's handling of Mr C's complaint to be relatively poor in view of the clear failings which had caused considerable distress and upset. The complaint was not treated with the degree of priority that it should have been, and Mr C did not receive a proper response to his request for a meeting.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the council:

- give a full apology for the distress caused and for the failings identified in this case, and offer an opportunity for the complainants to meet with the chief executive; and
- demonstrate that the lessons learned from this complaint have been communicated to relevant staff members.