

SPSO decision report

Case: 201606751, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: health
Subject: failure to send ambulance / delay in sending ambulance
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained to us that the Scottish Ambulance Service (the ambulance service) had delayed in responding to an alarm call made by her late mother (Mrs A). Mrs A lived in an assisted living complex and had made an alarm call to an alarm receiving centre (this was a private company that was not part of the ambulance service). She did not respond when the alarm receiving centre answered the call and they contacted the ambulance service. An emergency ambulance was dispatched to Mrs A's home, but it was then decided that this should be stood down and that another non-emergency ambulance would attend. On arrival at Mrs A's home paramedics found that she had died.

We took independent advice from a medical adviser, who is involved in the training of paramedics and who regularly works alongside them in the provision of pre-hospital care. We found that it had been reasonable for the ambulance service to cancel the emergency ambulance and to respond to the call using a non-emergency ambulance. This was in line with the agreed protocol and, as there was no information at that time to confirm that there was an urgent threat to life, we found that the time taken by the ambulance service to respond had been reasonable. The advice we received was that the risk of ambulances responding to calls using emergency blue light driving conditions for calls which turned out not to be life-threatening emergencies had to be taken into account. We did not uphold the complaint.