

SPSO decision report

Case: 201705027, Angus Council
Sector: local government
Subject: child services and family support
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained on behalf of his son (Mr A) about a number of matters in relation to social work involvement with their family. We took independent advice from a child and family social work adviser.

In relation to a social work assessment, Mr C was unhappy with the level of assessment of Mr A and his partner that was carried out. We found that the council had a good reason not to complete a full assessment of Mr A and his partner and we did not uphold this complaint.

Mr C was also unhappy about a delay in completing the assessment. We noted that the council had upheld Mr C's complaint about the delay in completing the assessments. We found that the council had issued a briefing note to staff regarding this issue. We upheld the complaint and gave the council feedback about further good practice for learning from complaints.

Mr C also raised concern about a social worker communicating sensitive information by phone rather than at a meeting. The council upheld the complaint and issued a briefing to staff about communication. Subsequently, the issue reoccurred and the council agreed to amend guidance to staff. We upheld the complaint.

Mr C complained about the way the council handled his request for a change in a member of staff involved in his family's case. We found that there was a lengthy delay in the council responding to Mr C. We noted that the response did not come from the officer who made the decision and no explanation for the decision was provided. We upheld the complaint.

Mr C further raised concerns about a number of aspects of complaint handling. We found that the council had failed to apologise to Mr C for the use of inappropriate language (an aspect of the complaint they had upheld) and had failed to fully investigate part of Mr C's complaint. We upheld the complaint.

Mr C also complained that the council failed to share with the family a concern about the wellbeing of the children that was identified by their school. We found that it would have been good practice to have shared this information. However, we were unable to conclude that the council acted unreasonably and we did not uphold this complaint.

Finally, Mr C complained about a delay in the school sharing assessments of the children with Mr A, when it had been agreed this would happen. The council acknowledged that there was no good reason for the delay. We upheld the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr A and Mr C for the delay in the completion of the assessments and the communication in

relation to this, not arranging a meeting to share sensitive information, the way they handled Mr C's request for another member of staff, the way Mr C's concern about the member of staff was handled, the use of inappropriate language, not investigating part of Mr C's complaint fully and unreasonably delaying sharing assessments. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- Where a service user or their representative requests a change in the staff involved in their case, this should be considered and appropriately responded to by the officer making the decision within a reasonable timescale with reasons given for their decision.
- Action points from a meeting should be completed within an agreed period of time.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- An investigation should establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents the final position.