

SPSO decision report

Case: 201709195, Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership
Sector: health and social care
Subject: home helps / concessions / grants / charges for services
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C, who works for an advocacy and support agency, complained on behalf of her client (Ms A) about the partnership's handling of Ms A's financial contribution towards her care package. Ms A had received an invoice for unpaid arrears and said that she was never informed that she had to make a financial contribution, and that she had not received any previous invoice before she was notified of the arrears.

We took independent advice from a social worker. We found that Ms A was provided with clear information about her requirement to make a financial contribution towards her care package. However, when difficulties in making those payments became apparent, we considered that the partnership did not take adequate proactive action to support Ms A to manage her finances. As a result, Ms A found herself in substantial debt. We upheld Ms C's complaint and made a number of recommendations. As a result of our recommendations, the partnership exercised their discretion and waived part of Ms A's accrued care charges.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Ms A for causing unnecessary stress and for the lack of clarity about the different mechanisms for financial recovery. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at: <https://www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance>.
- In accordance with their powers as stipulated in the relevant guidance, the partnership should review Ms A's debt and consider whether any reduction is appropriate in light of the failings identified in this investigation.

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

- Give consideration to how they will ensure that there are sufficient safeguards in place to prevent and address difficulties with client debt.
- Review how information about care charges and debts is communicated to clients.