

SPSO decision report



Case: 201807725, Fife Health and Social Care Partnership
Sector: Health and Social Care
Subject: complaint handling
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that his mother (Mrs A) was having problems with her monitored alarm system, which kept activating a carbon monoxide alarm. Mr C said the partnership had taken inadequate steps to investigate this, leaving Mrs A stuck in cycle of alarm activation, gas disconnection and reconnection, which was costing her money. It also meant that the source of the alarm was never identified. Mr C noted that the partnership's final action had been the removal of the alarm, which meant Mrs A potentially still had an unexplained source of carbon monoxide within her property.

The partnership had told Mr C that they were at a loss as to how they should investigate further. They had provided him with a third party claim form, to seek to recover the costs of the gas reconnection for Mrs A, but Mr C had opted not to do this.

We found that Mr C had provided the partnership with a reasonable suggestion for possible causes of activation for the alarm system. We considered that it was inaccurate for the partnership to say they had carried out a thorough investigation into the possible causes of the false activations of the carbon monoxide alarm. We upheld this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

Mr C also complained that the partnership failed to communicate with him reasonably or appropriately. Mr C said that he had insisted that his correspondence was not a formal complaint, although the partnership had treated it as one. We found that the partnership have the discretion to decide when correspondence would be better handled under their complaints procedure. However, the partnership did not explain to Mr C why they felt it was appropriate to take the matter forward as a complaint. They also failed to respond to the specific points Mr C raised in his subsequent correspondence. Therefore, we upheld this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for the failure to adequately investigate the issues he was raising and for the failure to acknowledge or address the issues raised by his correspondence. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.
- Investigate the possible causes of alarm activation suggested by Mr C in his complaint to the partnership.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Complaint investigations should whenever possible be agreed with the complainant before they start.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.