

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 202007781, Scottish Ambulance Service  
**Sector:** Health  
**Subject:** Failure to send ambulance / delay in sending ambulance  
**Decision:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

C's late partner (A) tested positive for COVID-19. A's condition worsened over time and C called 111 as they were concerned A's breathing was becoming laboured. C had to wait around 20 minutes before the call was answered. Once connected, the call lasted around 30 minutes. The call handler contacted the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) and said that they were 'looking to arrange an immediate response for a patient'. A's condition deteriorated further and C made a 999 call around ten minutes after ending the call to 111, as assistance had not yet arrived. However, by the time paramedics arrived, A had stopped breathing and could not be resuscitated.

C complained about the length of time it took for an ambulance to arrive. They complained that paramedics did not arrive in personal protective equipment (PPE), and considered that they wasted time getting dressed outside when it was an emergency call. C also queried whether a defibrillator (an electronic device that applies an electric shock to restore the rhythm of a fibrillating heart) had been used as they could not hear any shock being administered.

We took independent advice from a paramedic. With regard to the initial call from NHS 24, we found that this had been dealt with appropriately. The call taker had assigned the request for an ambulance the correct level of priority, in terms of the SAS coding system in place at the time. Therefore, we did not uphold this aspect of the complaint. However, we noted weaknesses in the NHS 24-SAS service interaction and suggested that SAS review the process and consider making improvements if necessary.

We found that the response to the 999 call was reasonable, proportionate and timely. We noted that it would not have been appropriate to provide shock to A, given their clinical condition. We also accepted SAS' explanation as to why crew required to put on PPE when they arrived at the scene, which was necessary for infection control. We did not uphold this complaint.