

COMMITTEE	Audit, Risk and Scrutiny
DATE	26 September 2017
REPORT TITLE	Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and Inspector of Crematoria Complaint Decisions
REPORT NUMBER	CG/17/102
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT:-

In order to provide assurance to Committee that complaints and Scottish Welfare Fund applications are being handled appropriately, this report provides information on all Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and Inspector of Crematoria decisions made in relation to Aberdeen City Council since the last reporting cycle.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee notes the details of the report and recommends any additional actions as appropriate.

3. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

A report detailing all Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and/or Inspector of Crematoria decisions relating to Aberdeen City Council is submitted to Audit Risk and Scrutiny Committee each reporting cycle. This is to provide assurance that complaints and Scottish Welfare Fund decisions are being handled appropriately. The last report on this matter was submitted to the 27 June 2017 Committee.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Complaint Decisions

The Scottish Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) has three stages:

- Stage 1 - Frontline Resolution
- Stage 2 - Formal Investigation
- Stage 3 - Independent External Review (SPSO)

The first two stages of the complaints handling process are dealt with internally by the council. The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of the council's complaints procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failures and maladministration (administrative fault), as well as the way the council has handled the complaint.

The ombudsman has the authority to make a final decision on the complaint. Following their investigation, the SPSO write to the council and the complainant with the outcome of their decision. Where necessary the SPSO will make recommendations that the council must implement to address a customer's dissatisfaction and / or to prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again. The SPSO also instruct the timescales for implementing their recommendations.

Since the last reporting period, the SPSO have not made any decisions relating to Aberdeen City Council complaints referred to the Ombudsman for consideration. We are still awaiting the outcome of an SPSO decision appealed by Aberdeen City Council, which was included in the previous 27 June 2017 Committee report.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Scottish Welfare Fund Review Decisions

The Scottish Welfare Fund is delivered by Local Councils across Scotland and offers 2 types of grants – Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants. They are intended to meet one-off needs and not to meet on-going expenses. They do not have to be paid back.

If an applicant is unhappy with the council's decision regarding a grant application, they can ask for the decision to be looked at again in an internal First Tier Review. If they disagree with the 'First Tier Review' decision then they have the right to ask the SPSO for an independent 'Second Tier Review'.

During the 2017/18 financial year to date, the SPSO have carried out 2 Second Tier Reviews in relation to Aberdeen City Council Scottish Welfare Fund application decisions. The SPSO upheld the Aberdeen City Council decisions on both occasions.

Inspector of Crematoria Decisions

The Inspector of Crematoria is responsible for providing appropriate oversight and scrutiny of practices within Scotland's crematoria and is also a point of contact for families who have any concerns about crematoria practices, anywhere in Scotland.

The Inspector of Crematoria responds to complaints or queries from the public about cremations. There have been no decisions by the Inspector of Crematoria in relation to Aberdeen City Council cremations to date.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

No risks have been identified in this report.

7. IMPACT SECTION

Economy

Complaints provide rich customer insight for the organisation to act upon to help transform service delivery. The organisation should look to solve the core issue which led to the complaint and learn from the outcome of complaints so to reduce the potential for more / similar complaints. This leads to a reduction in time spent on handling and investigating repeat complaints, which can be a lengthy process for those involved.

People

The Aberdeen City Council complaints procedure can be easily accessed by all service users and by whichever means is easiest for the complainant. The outcomes of complaint decisions are fed back to the complainant and also to the relevant staff. This includes both upheld and not upheld decisions to engage staff in complaints handling and ensure they are fully informed of outcomes. Complaint information is also used to inform changes in working practices and training provision for staff to improve their experience as well as that of the customer. SPSO recommendations relating to complaints handling are fed back to the responding officers to help develop the key skills required for good complaints handling.

Place

There are no direct implications on 'Place' arising from the recommendations of this report.

Technology

There are no direct implications on 'Technology' arising from the recommendations of this report.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

9. APPENDICES (if applicable)

Appendix A – Complaint Details and Subsequent SPSO Recommendations
Appendix B – Scottish Welfare Fund SPSO Review Decisions

10. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Appendix A - Complaint Details and Subsequent Recommendations

Complaint Received Date	SPSO Decision Date	Complaints Investigated by the SPSO	Directorate	Decision	SPSO Recommendations	Date Implemented
4 July 2016	10 April 2017	Aberdeen City Council failed to take reasonable action in relation to the customer's complaints that the greenspace behind his home was being used by a school, contrary to the Council's Parks and Outdoor Areas Management Rules 2014.	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure	Complaint Upheld	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The council should apologise to the complainant for failing to properly consider his complaint. 2. The Council should ensure activities taking place on the greenspace are in line with the 2014 rules. 	Due 11 May 2017. (However, the council has appealed the decision. The outcome of the appeal is yet to be determined)

Appendix B – Scottish Welfare Fund SPSO Review Decisions

Crisis Grant Application Received	Application Type	Aberdeen City Council 1st Tier Review Decision Date	SPSO 2nd Tier Review Decision Date	Outcome
5 th June 2017	Crisis Grant	6 th June 2017	8 th June 2017	Aberdeen City Council decision upheld
3 rd July 2017	Crisis Grant	4 th July 2017	6 th July 2017	Aberdeen City Council decision upheld