

## SPSO decision report



**Case:** 201810444, West Dunbartonshire Council  
**Sector:** Local Government  
**Subject:** Complaints handling  
**Decision:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained on behalf of themselves and their neighbours. The council planned to redevelop the site of a former school, which is situated behind their properties. C raised a number of questions, concerns and objections on behalf of the local residents regarding plans for the site, maintenance of the area and the council's management of works being carried out on the site. Despite regular email and phone contact with the council, C complained that residents were not kept informed about work planned on the site or how their concerns would be addressed. C was also dissatisfied with the way their complaints about the situation were handled.

We found that the council generally recognised the impact the development had on the residents and took steps to address the issues that they raised. Whilst internally, they acted reasonably with regard to management and maintenance of the site and could show the reasoning as to why certain decisions had been reached, we found that the council's communication with C was poor. On a number of occasions, C would ask specific questions about aspects of the development, but would receive very general responses. This led to confusion and mistrust on the residents' part. While we found the council's communication to be poor, we considered that the council reasonably managed, maintained and repaired the site. We did not uphold this aspect of C's complaint.

In relation to complaint handling, we were critical of the council's handling of C's complaint. Whilst they responded to C's various calls and emails in good time, we again found that specific points raised by C were not addressed directly. We also found that, although C had direct access to a number of key members of staff, this meant that C's concerns were not escalated through a formal complaints process and largely went unresolved as a result. We upheld this aspect of C's complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the failures identified in the council's handling of the complaint. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets](http://www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets).
- The council should contact C to check whether there are any outstanding concerns that have not already been responded to and that these are agreed in writing and responded to in full.

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.