

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201904012, Scottish Ambulance Service  
**Sector:** Health  
**Subject:** Failure to send ambulance / delay in sending ambulance  
**Decision:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained on behalf of their parent (A) after A was unwell and a GP made a home visit to assess them. The GP called for an ambulance for a 'within the hour' response. The ambulance service called back later and spoke with C to advise that the ambulance was delayed and would attend as soon as possible. C later called 999 and advised that A's condition had deteriorated. This resulted in a higher priority ambulance being assigned.

C complained to the ambulance service about the failure to respond to the requests for an ambulance. In response, the ambulance service acknowledged they failed to meet the initial one-hour response requested, but explained that one-hour ambulance responses are not automatically upgraded. They said that in these circumstances they call back to explain the delay, ask if there is a change in the patient's condition and advise patients to call 999 if there is a change.

C complained to our office that the ambulance service had failed to take account of A's diagnosis provided by the GP, and had therefore not attributed the correct level of priority to the response. C also considered that there was no attempt by the ambulance service to undertake clinical triage of A, resulting in the response level not being upgraded as it should have been. C was unhappy with the investigation and response to their complaint and believed the ambulance service's response to the complaint was not plausible.

We found that whilst there was a significant delay in the ambulance attending to A, this was attributable not to failings on the part of the ambulance service in prioritising the request for an ambulance, but on the lack of available resources at the time.

However, we found that during the welfare call back, the ambulance service should have sought to clarify whether C considered A's condition had deteriorated before continuing with the call. On this basis, we upheld the complaint with respect to unreasonably failing to respond to the request for an ambulance. With respect to the complaint about the complaints investigation, we found the complaints investigation and response was reasonable and did not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to confirm whether or not A's condition had worsened before continuing with the call. 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).

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

- In circumstances where a call handler calls a patient, in line with the Urgent Welfare Call Back Process, they should make reasonable efforts to confirm whether or not the patient's condition has worsened.

Where a call handler is unable to obtain clarification as to whether the patient's condition has worsened, the call handler should process the call through the MPDS system in line with the normal emergency call handling process.

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.