



Northern Ireland
Public Services
Ombudsman



Investigating Officer (Analyst)

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Candidate Information Booklet (NIPSO/IO/02-25)

2024

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1. MESSAGE FROM MARGARET KELLY, NI PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

Thank you for your interest in the position of Investigating Officer at the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

This is an exciting time to join us to help us deliver our vision of making a positive difference to people and public services in Northern Ireland through impartially and independently investigating complaints of maladministration. We view complaints as an ‘early warning’ system to improve public services and our opportunity to inform public policy. We launched our new Strategic Plan in 2022-23 following consultation both internally and externally with the aim to make sure we have a relevant, modern and inclusive Ombudsman’s Office for the people of Northern Ireland.

We have a unique governance structure which reflects my position as the statutory holder of three offices – Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman and Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner for Standards. This requires a balance between appropriate controls and oversight, while preserving the independence of my role. I am accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee, and we have an independent Audit and Risk Committee who monitor our corporate governance, risk management and control systems.

As Investigating Officer, you will play a key role in a busy team undertaking investigations of complaints about public services or allegations that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct. You will have the opportunity to seek resolution for individuals and to suggest recommendations to improve public services in Northern Ireland. The breadth of the jurisdiction of my office means that the work undertaken by an Investigating Officer is interesting and varied.

This is a challenging but rewarding role. If you are excited about the work that we undertake and believe you have the skills and experience to make a difference, I very much look forward to receiving your application.

Margaret Kelly

Northern Ireland Public
Services Ombudsman



2. WHO WE ARE

The Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) was established in April 2016 in accordance with the [Public Services Ombudsman Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#) (“the Act”). The Act replaced and extended the remit of the previous offices of Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints. Since 2016, NIPSO’s workload has doubled and the organisation continues to grow.

We are publicly funded but operate independently from all other public bodies in Northern Ireland. We currently employ approximately 60 staff and we are based in Progressive House in central Belfast.

The Ombudsman’s main role is to investigate complaints of maladministration made about public services, including complaints about Government Departments and their agencies, local Councils, health and social care, education bodies, public housing providers and a range of other public service providers. We also play a key role in contributing to broader improvement in public services by sharing the learning from both individual complaints and systemic reports (work that we call ‘Own Initiative’).

The Ombudsman is also the Local Government Commissioner for Standards, and the office investigates and where appropriate adjudicates on complaints where a Councillor is alleged to have breached the Code of Conduct for Councillors. The Ombudsman is also the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman.



3. WHAT WE DO

The Ombudsman’s role is to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are served by a fair and efficient public administration that is committed to accountability, openness, and the provision of high quality public services.

Assessing and investigating complaints of maladministration, including professional judgment in health and social care is the largest single area of our work. During 2023-24 we received 1,173 complaints, an increase of 118% over the period since NIPSO was established in 2016 (when 539 complaints were received). The table below illustrates the trend in new maladministration complaints received since over the past five years:

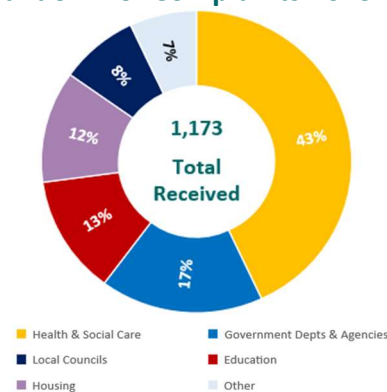
Year	Total	Year on Year % Change	Cumulative change since 2016-17
2019-20	1043	37%	94%
2020-21	927	22%	72%
2021-22	1211	59%	125%
2022-23	1046	37%	94%
2023-24	1173	54%	118%

During 2023-24, 43% of the complaints we received related to Health & Social Care Services in Northern Ireland.

The other 57% of complaints related to Government Departments (17%), Education (13%), Housing (12%) and Councils (8%).

The remaining 7% were categorised as ‘other’ complaints.

Breakdown of Complaints 2023-24¹



In relation to our Local Government Ethical Standards role, during 2023-24 we received 31 allegations that Councillors may have breached the Local Government Code of Conduct. These related to social media posts, disclosure of confidential information and the registration / declaration of interests.

In 2023-24 we published an Own Initiative report on waiting lists communications, and overview report on Tree Preservation Orders and a follow up report on ‘PIP and the Value of Further Evidence’.

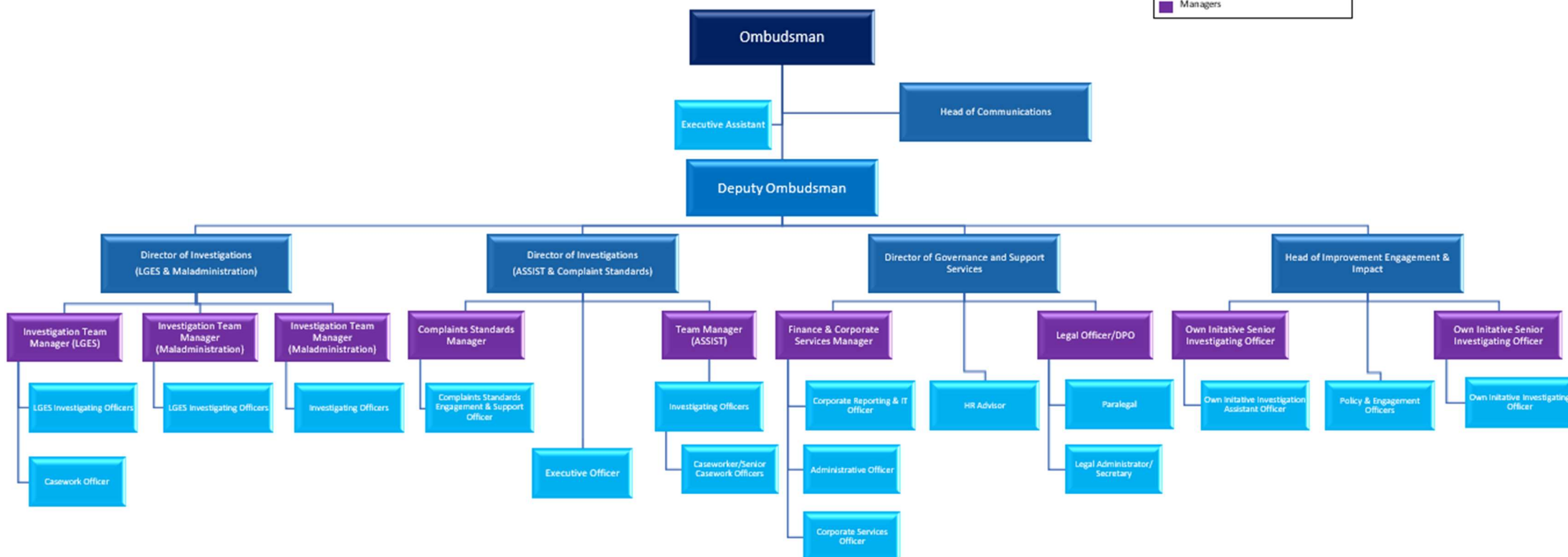
Interested candidates can read more about our future plans in our [Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025](#) and our annual performance in our latest [Annual Report & Accounts 2022-2023](#).

¹ 2023-24 provisional figures

4. OUR STRUCTURE

NIPSO has grown considerably since it was established in 2016 both in terms of functions, budget and staff numbers. As a result, NIPSO has embarked on a programme of improvement of its internal systems including the establishment of a new case handling system, a new finance system, establishment of a new records management system and we are embarking on updating the office human resource management system. The senior management team are focused on ensuring that we have effective systems to support the front-line staff of NIPSO, ensuring that we meet our statutory obligations and bring about improvements in public services through our work.

The Investigation Officer (IO) will be key in ensuring that NIPSO achieves its strategic objectives and delivering a quality service for service users in line with NIPSOs values. Our current structure is set out below:



5. OUR VISION AND VALUES

Our vision and values are very important to us and underpin everything we do as an organisation.

OUR VISION STATEMENT

Make a positive difference to people and public services in Northern Ireland by providing individual resolution and improved services through learning from complaints.

OUR PURPOSE

Investigate unresolved complaints about public bodies, uphold standards and ensure accountability for both public bodies and for local Councillors. Contribute to broader improvement by sharing the learning from both individual complaints and systemic reports.

OUR VALUES

Our **values** underpin and drive all our decisions, actions, policies, processes and systems and how we engage internally and externally.

Independence

We are open, non-partisan, unbiased, and we act with integrity.

Fairness

We are honest and impartial, ensure all views are listened to and use an evidence-based approach to our decision making.

People Focused

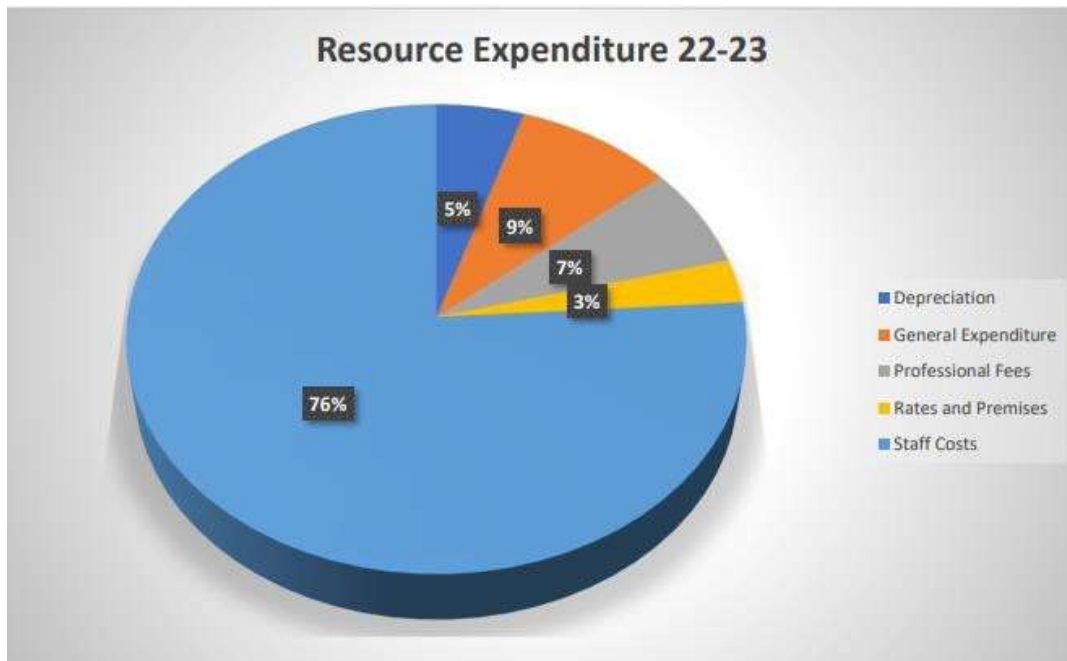
We treat people with respect and empathy and recognise and value individual experience. We are accessible and engage and explain our decision making.

Excellence

We deliver an excellent service, meeting our service standards with high levels of governance and accountability. We have a focus on continuous learning and improvement.

6. OUR FINANCIALS

We have a total annual operating expenditure of approx. £4m, the vast majority of which relates to our staff costs. The breakdown of our resource expenditure for 2022-23 is summarised below:



You can access our latest accounts in our [Annual Report and Accounts 2022-2023](#)

7. JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Title: Investigating Officer

Reporting to: Team Manager

Grade: Staff Officer

Salary: £34,524 - £35,712 per annum

Location: Belfast

Main purpose of job

To undertake impartial desk-based analysis and investigation of complaints, from people who believe they have been treated unfairly by a public body

To assess and in appropriate cases, investigate complaints alleging that a Councillor or a former Councillor may have breached the NI Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors.

To support the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) within the 'Own Initiative' investigation function by impartially assessing and investigating concerns of possible systemic maladministration and/or systemic injustice by public bodies in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

In each of these roles the post holder will be required to prepare detailed written reports.

Summary of principal duties and responsibilities

Investigating Officers, acting in accordance with the scheme of delegation that is in place will:

- Investigate and analyse complaints in accordance with the 2016 Public Services Ombudsman Act, Councillor Code of Conduct, Local Government Act 2014 and the operational procedures and standards of the Office.
- Communicate effectively with service users and public bodies in line with the values of the office.
- Manage a caseload and other competing priorities while taking personal responsibility for completion of tasks and casework to meet organisational targets, individual performance indicators and service standards.
- Identify the key issues in a complaint and make proportionate enquiries to gather relevant information.

- Analyse large volumes of information from a range of sources, to make a determination on a case.
- Interview parties to the investigation and witnesses as appropriate.
- Reach conclusions, propose findings and make recommendations.
- Develop and issue relevant high quality internal and external communications, including evidence-based briefings for senior management.
- Monitor and evaluate compliance with recommendations made to public bodies.
- Maintain accurate information on the case management system.
- Maintain professional working relationships with colleagues and key stakeholders; and promote the role of the Ombudsman's office at external events.
- Maintain an awareness of changes in public sector policy and environment.

General Responsibilities & Duties

- Adhere to the NIPSO values of independence, fairness, people focused, excellence;
- Adhere to and promote the Office policies on Equality of Opportunity and Dignity at Work, demonstrating a commitment to the principles of equality, fairness and diversity in all aspects of work;
- Have due regard for your own safety and wellbeing; and that of others, behaving appropriately at all times and reporting all accidents no matter how minor;
- Take responsibility for the development of own skills and knowledge through proactive engagement in the internal performance review processes;
- Undertake ad-hoc, cross-functional project work supporting the development of the Office and service provision as reasonably requested by your line manager.

This job description is subject to review and amendment as the demands of the role and the organisation evolves. Therefore, the postholder will be required to be flexible and adaptable and aware that they may be asked to perform tasks, duties and responsibilities which are not specifically detailed in the job description but which are commensurate with the role.

8. PERSON SPECIFICATION

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA

Applicants must, as at the closing date for receipt of applications, be able to demonstrate by providing personal and specific examples on their application form that they have:

Qualifications

- (i) Educated to degree level (or equivalent) **AND** a minimum of 2 years' relevant work experience in collecting and analysing information to arrive at evidence based, written conclusions. (AF & I)

OR

A minimum of 4 years' relevant work experience in collecting and analysing information to arrive at evidence based, written conclusions. (AF & I)

Experience

- (ii) Strong analytical skills and the ability to use sound and balanced judgment to support well reasoned and appropriate decisions (AF, AC & I);
- (iii) Identifying and interpreting relevant legislation, codes and guidance, regulation or procedural requirements (AF, AC & I);
- (iv) Excellent written communication skills with the ability to write clearly and capture all important facts and opinions in drafting letters and reports (AF, AC & I);
- (v) Excellent organisational and planning skills including the ability to manage a significant and complex caseload and meet tight timescales (AF & I);
- (vi) Strong interpersonal skills including the ability to deal with robust challenge whilst showing appropriate empathy (I);
- (vii) Experience of carrying out challenging interviews to gather information (AF, AC & I).

DESIRABLE CRITERIA

In addition to the above essential criteria, NIPSO reserves the right to only shortlist those candidates who can also demonstrate, by providing personal and specific examples on the application form that they have:

- (i) Knowledge of good investigative practices and approaches (AF)
- (ii) Proven ability to utilise research techniques (AF)

SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Applicants must be able to demonstrate evidence of the following skills, competencies and attributes which will be tested at assessment centre and/or final interview:

- Oral and Written Communication
- Collaborative Working
- Analytical and Problem Solving
- Decision making and accountability
- Continuous Improvement

9. WORKING FOR US

Remuneration

The salary for this post is currently equivalent to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Staff Officer which is £34,524 - £35,712 per annum.

Location

The role will be based at NIPSO, Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN.

Working Arrangements

We operate hybrid working arrangements i.e. a mix of working from home and from the office which offers employees additional workstyle choices.

Candidates should note that whilst we do have a flexible approach, the operational requirements are likely to require office based working a minimum of 2 days per week.

Working Hours

The post is permanent, full-time (37 hours per week), subject to a probationary period of 9 months.

Pension

The successful candidate will be eligible to join the NICS Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.

Annual Leave

Annual leave entitlement is 25 days annual leave, rising to 30 days after 5 years' service, plus 12 days public holidays.

Other benefits

We have a generous occupational sick pay and maternity, paternity and adoption leave/pay arrangements, as well as a suite of work-life balance policies. Employees also have access to an Employee Assistance Programme.

We provide support for ongoing training and provide development opportunities for all staff. In 2022 we implemented a coaching framework to ensure all employees of NIPSO receive regular support and guidance from their line manager.

10. SELECTION PROCESS

Application forms are available on our [website](#) or obtained by emailing monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk

Completed application and monitoring forms must be returned by email to monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk no later than **12 noon on Monday 20th May 2024**.

Applicants who meet the shortlisting criteria will be invited to participate in a selection and assessment process.

In the event of a high volume of applications NIPSO reserves the right to apply additional criteria in order to achieve a manageable shortlist of applicants.

Guidance notes for completing your application form

NIPSO is committed to providing equality of opportunity for all job applicants. The information you supply on this application form will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be used solely for assessing your suitability for the post.

A candidate found to have knowingly given false information, or to have wilfully suppressed any material fact will be liable to disqualification from the process, or if appointed, to dismissal. All appointments are made on merit and in accordance with our Recruitment and Selection Policy.

Any canvassing of officers directly or indirectly in connection with an appointment will automatically disqualify the candidate.

Applications will only be accepted on the specific NIPSO application form. Incomplete application forms will not be considered. CVs, letters or any other supplementary material will not be accepted in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms and will not be made available to the shortlisting or interview panel.

Please also note:

- Applications which are received after the closing date or time will not be accepted.
- Please use black ink/type when completing your application form.
- Please keep responses limited to the space provided and where applications are being typed ensure a minimum font size of 12.
- It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the completed form, together with the completed Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form, is returned by the closing date for applications.

Qualifications

You will be asked to provide original qualification certificates (or, where you have mislaid your original certificates, a certified statement of results from the relevant awarding body) and proof of memberships etc. that are relevant to the post applied for before any offer of employment can be made.

If you believe that your qualification is equivalent to the one required, you must provide specific evidence to demonstrate its equivalency in comparison to the qualification that was specifically detailed in the person specification.

If you possess any professional qualifications, please include the full details and include the date of the award.

If you have membership of a professional body please include the name of the body or organisation, the type of membership you hold (e.g., student, associate, fellow etc.), the date when this grade of membership was obtained and the expiry date (if any). If the membership has lapsed, please state this.

Experience

It is necessary to state your exact dates and periods of employment as at the application closing date (month/year) because this is calculated to the nearest month for shortlisting purposes. The shortlisting panel will only consider the information asked for in each separate box on the application.

You will be required to clearly demonstrate, by giving personal and specific details on your application form, how you meet the experience detailed in the person specification in the relevant box. If you do not supply sufficient information on your application form to clearly demonstrate that you meet the criteria, you will not be shortlisted.

Conflicts of Interest

Given the breadth of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction (namely her roles in investigating complaints about all public service providers in Northern Ireland and in investigating and adjudicating on alleged breaches of the NI Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors), it is important that any actual or perceived conflicts of interest are declared.

You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form to complete. This asks you to consider and declare whether or not you have an actual or perceived conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute an actual or perceived conflict, you should still complete this section in order to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

For further assistance you may wish to consult the Northern Ireland Audit Office good practice guide on conflicts of interest.

Any actual or perceived conflicts of interest detailed in the application form will not prevent you going forward to interview if you are shortlisted but will be explored further to establish how you would address the issue(s) should you be appointed.

Selection and Assessment Process

Shortlisting will take place during **week commencing 20th May 2024**. Candidates who demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria and if required, the desirable criteria, will be invited to attend a competency-based interview.

Candidates who demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria and if required, the desirable criteria, will be invited to attend an assessment envisaged to be held during **week commencing 3rd June 2024**. Further details of the process will be provided to candidates invited to participate in this process.

Interviews are envisaged to take place during **week commencing 17th June 2024**. Further details of the process will be provided to candidates invited to interview.

A reserve list of candidates may be held for a period of twelve months and may be activated on a merit basis if a vacancy arises within that period.

Principles of the Appointment

NIPSO is committed to providing and promoting equality of opportunity and to the principle of recruiting on the basis of merit only. We welcome applications from all suitably qualified candidates regardless of their gender, including gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, having or not having dependants, pregnancy and maternity, religious beliefs, political opinion, race, ethnic origin, colour or nationality, sexual orientation, disability, age, Trade Union membership or non- membership or criminal records.

All NIPSO offers of employment are conditional and subject to successful pre-employment checks and the successful applicant will be required to:

- provide documentation to confirm their identity and their right to work in the UK;
- provide documentation to verify information already provided on the application form, e.g. qualifications, professional registration, driving licence, etc;
- provide a basic AccessNI Check, which the successful candidate must obtain and the cost of which will be reimbursed upon appointment;
- provide satisfactory references, one of which must be from the candidate's current or most recent employer.

Further Information

If you have any further queries regarding the recruitment and selection process, then please contact Hannah McGuffie, HR Advisor (monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk)