

## Own Initiative Investigations

**The purpose of an Own Initiative investigation is to examine whether widespread failings have occurred within an area of public service. Where we find failings we make recommendations to improve the service. The investigations are referred to as 'Own Initiative' as we can undertake the investigation without having received a public complaint.**

### How are issues identified?

We may identify a potential Own Initiative investigation across a wide range of public services, and from a wide range of sources. Sources may include, but are not limited to:

- public concern about an issue;
- a pattern of complaints or a lack of complaints about an issue;
- media reports, government reports, as well as reports of other bodies.

Occasionally an issue may be highlighted by a member of the public. The limited resources available to undertake this work mean that it is not possible for ongoing updates, or detailed feedback, to be provided to those who raise an issue.

### How we decide to Investigate

Once a potential issue is identified, it is assessed by the Own Initiative team to decide whether or not it **can** and **should** be investigated.

We must determine whether there is a reasonable suspicion of systemic failures, and whether the issue meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. The issue of concern has been identified by the Ombudsman to be one of **public interest**;
2. The issue of concern affects a **number of individuals** or a **particular group of people**;
3. The investigation has the **potential to improve public services**;

AND

4. The Ombudsman considers the investigation of the chosen issue is the **best** and **most proportionate** use of **investigative resources**.

## Investigation Proposal

If we decide that an issue should be investigated we must first write to the public body, putting forward reasons for the investigation. This letter is called an 'Investigation Proposal'. If the public body/bodies provide evidence to demonstrate why the investigation should not commence, for example, if they have already planned improvements to the service, we will take this in to consideration.

## Investigation

If we decide to commence an investigation, we use a wide range of investigative methods to establish if repeat failings are occurring/have occurred and, if so, whether improvements are required.

If you have previously raised a complaint with NIPSO, which is related to an issue being investigated by the Own Initiative team, we may contact you during the investigation for further information. Further details relating to our information handling can be found in our **Privacy Notice**.

## What happens following an investigation?

Own Initiative investigation reports are published on the NIPSO website [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk), and are laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

We follow up on any recommendations made within an Own Initiative investigation report in order to ensure they are appropriately implemented.

## How to contact the Ombudsman's Office

**Freepost:** Freepost NIPSO

or  
The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, BELFAST, BT1 6HN

**Telephone:** 028 9023 3821 **or Freephone:** 0800 34 34 24

**Text Phone:** 028 9089 7789

**Website:** [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

**Email:** [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk) **or**  
Own initiative team email: [owninitiative@nipso.org.uk](mailto:owninitiative@nipso.org.uk)

or  
By calling, 9.00am & 5.00pm, Monday to Friday,  
at the above address.