



Northern Ireland

**Public Services**

Ombudsman

# **Casework Officer**

**Permanent**

**Applicant Pack**

**NIPSO/CO/04/24**

## Contents

Prior to completion of the application form candidates should familiarise themselves with the contents of this pack.

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## Section A

### What do Casework Officers do and what key skills are needed?

Our work is underpinned by the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 which grants the office a range of powers to investigate complaints from individuals about Public Bodies and or that a local Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct.

We also have 'Own Initiative' powers which enable us to investigate issues of wider public interest – even if an individual hasn't brought a case to the office.

Our team of Casework Officers perform a key function in NIPSO's aim to provide individuals with access to justice through the independent investigation of unresolved complaints. The role is diverse and will appeal to those with a desire to apply their analytic and problem-solving skills to drive forward improvement in public services.

Casework Officers need to be curious, resilient and tenacious in their attention to detail. Issues under assessment are very diverse and can be about almost any Public Body in Northern Ireland including Health & Social Care, Education, Councils, Government Departments and Housing. Every unresolved complaint is unique and every individual bringing a complaint to NIPSO is different. Good people skills and interpersonal communication is essential for this role.

Casework Officers work with others in NIPSO to share our investigation findings with the public, to communicate recommendations for service improvement and raise awareness of the important work of the Office.

### Background to the NIPSO Office

The Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) was established in April 2016. This was in accordance with the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 ("the Act").

The Act has improved public access to redress, strengthened the powers of investigation, enhanced public interest reporting and increased the Office's visibility and profile.

The Act may be accessed [here](#). The main functions of the office are:

1. To consider complaints about the majority of public services in Northern Ireland after the complaint has been considered by the public body. This includes health and social care, central government, local government, housing and education;
2. To make recommendations to provide individual redress as well as recommendations to bring about wider service improvements;
3. To bring about a simple standardised process for handling complaints in the public sector focused on resolution and learning from complaints;

4. To conduct investigations into wider systemic issues to bring about systemic improvement or address systemic injustice without the need for a complaint;
5. To publish our reports and decisions and share insights to bring about wider learning and improvement from complaints and investigations;
6. To use the outcomes from our work to engage effectively and influence positive change in public services and public policy;
7. To perform the role of Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman.

Funding for NIPSO is approved by the Audit Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The NIPSO budget for 2023/24 is £3.9 M.

### **Local Government Commissioner for Standards**

The Ombudsman is also the Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner for Standards. This role involves promoting the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors, both investigating and where appropriate adjudicating on complaints that a Councillor has breached the Code.

The investigation and adjudication functions are separated by an ethical wall to ensure procedural fairness.

In addition to investigation and adjudication, engagement with Councillors and their representative bodies is an important aspect of the function. The delivery of training on and improving awareness of the Code of Conduct for Councillors with local Councils and the Councillor community to improve understanding of the Code and improve standards is an essential aspect of the work. The funding for this aspect of the work is provided by local Councils through the Department for Communities and is included in the overall NIPSO budget.

## **Section B – Job Description**

**Post:** Casework Officer

*These posts could be based within the ASSIST or LGES teams*

**Reporting to:** Team Managers, ASSIST/LGES

**Grade:** £26,569 - £27,127 p.a. (EOII Scale)

**Location:** Belfast

### **Main purpose of job**

The Casework Officer (CO) role is to undertake initial assessments of complaints received by NIPSO, in line with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. The CO will provide advice and assistance to our service users, will signpost where appropriate and will provide additional administrative assistance as required.

In addition, the CO role provides administrative support to the investigation and adjudication function of the NI Local Government Commissioner for Standards. This includes providing advice and assistance to cases and undertaking an initial assessment of cases.

### **Summary of principal duties and responsibilities**

*The main duties and responsibilities of this role are to:*

- Undertake an initial assessment of each case received within target timeframe to establish if the case should be accepted for assessment when examined against the requirements of the legislation underpinning the role of the Ombudsman/Commissioner.
- To review and assess complex information, to make relevant enquiries and gather information to make evidence-based decisions, in line with the legislation.
- Request and obtain material required for investigative purposes to include assisting with investigation report preparation.
- To communicate the Initial Assessment Decision effectively orally and in writing, drawing on the relevant legislative provisions, explaining if a case can or cannot be accepted for assessment.

- Provide verbal and written advice and assistance to service users, public bodies, councillors and MLAs in relation to their case.
- Effectively managing a caseload ensuring that the Office Key Performance Indicators are met to the required standard and adhering to the NIPSO procedural requirements.
- Undertake interviews with service users who call in to the Office for advice and assistance or who have submitted matters for consideration.
- Initiating electronic records on the case management system ensuring accuracy in data recording and adhering to internal office policies on records management and GDPR.
- Work with other teams within NIPSO to share knowledge and identify trends to contribute to new workstreams.
- Provide ongoing administrative support to Investigating Officers and Team Managers undertaking assessment and investigations of cases to include making telephone and written enquiries of service users, councillors to whom allegations relate, MLAs, public bodies, and other interested parties, arranging meetings and note taking at meetings as required.
- Answer telephone calls received through the Office's main line or freephone number, respond to email and written communication, meet service users who attend the office seeking advice in person in addition to the recording of incoming and outgoing post.
- Ensure office cover is in place for dealing with telephone calls and in person attendance during working hours.
- Meet and greet visitors to the Office as required.
- Develop and maintain effective relationships with colleagues within NIPSO and public bodies within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.
- Respond to requests for advice from other Casework Officers/Administrative officers (if appropriate) and escalate to the Team Manager as necessary.
- Contribute to, and play an active role in, team meetings with a view to improving processes and service delivery.
- Take responsibility for own continuous self-development to enhance performance including undertaking relevant training and development and work shadowing.
- Undertake any other reasonable duties as requested by management.

- Provide ongoing administrative support to the Adjudication Team on adjudication matters including preparing case bundles for all parties for adjudication hearings and dealing with enquiries from councillors and witnesses.
- Maintain, track and report on spreadsheets recording statistics including details of case numbers, outcomes, and KPI performance.

### **General Responsibilities & Duties**

- Adhere to the NIPSO values of fairness, impartiality, openness, respect and integrity.
- 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.
- 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 may be updated to reflect NIPSO's future requirements.*

## Section C – Person Specification

**Post:** Casework Officer

**Responsible to:** Team Manager

**Salary:** £26,569 - £27,127 p.a. (EOII Scale)

**Location:** Belfast

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*Method of Selection: Application form (AF); Interview (I)*

### **Essential Criteria – Qualifications, experience, knowledge and job-related attributes**

- Educated to A level standard or equivalent. (AF)
- 2 years' relevant experience in an administrative role within a busy customer service environment. (AF, I)
- Previous experience of using a case handling system and of developing and maintaining systems to collate and monitor data to generate reports and ensure quality standards are met. (AF, I)
- Previous experience of preparing draft reports. (AF, I)
- Good attention to detail and a commitment to timeliness, quality and accuracy and confidentiality in information processing. (AF, I)
- Good organisational and planning skills and the ability to work to deadlines to manage competing priorities and meet KPIs. (AF, I)
- Excellent written and oral communication skills including the ability to communicate effectively with stakeholders at all levels. (I)
- Competent in the use of Microsoft Office packages to extract information and produce reports. (AF, I)
- Ability to work as part of a team and contribute to continuous improvement. (AF)



## **Desirable Criteria – Experience, knowledge and job-related skills and attributes**

- Previous experience of interpreting legislation/policy issues to inform work-based decisions. (AF)

## **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 by you.<sup>1</sup>

You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form for you 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 must 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.

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<sup>1</sup> See Schedule 3 of Public Services Ombudsman Act (NI) 2016 for the Schedule of Listed Authorities.

## **Section D – The Application and Selection Process**

### ***MAKING AN APPLICATION***

Application forms can be obtained by emailing [monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk) or from the website [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk).

Completed application and monitoring forms must be returned by email to [monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk) **no later than 12 noon on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023.**

### ***GUIDANCE NOTES FOR COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATION FORM***

#### ***PLEASE READ CAREFULLY***

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.

#### ***Application Forms***

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.

As part of the shortlisting process, the panel will consider the standard of written information provided on the application form. Candidates must clearly demonstrate on their application form a high degree of literacy skills appropriate to this post.

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***

Please provide the following information for any qualifications required in the person specification:-

- Year:** the year you were awarded the qualification(s)
- Level:** e.g. GCSE, RSA/OCR Stage 2 and Parts if applicable i.e. Parts 1 and 2, CIPD, RQF/PTLLS, Degree, BTEC National Diploma, BTEC Higher National Certificate etc.
- Subject:** title of subject studied e.g. English, Mathematics
- Mark/Grade:** e.g. A, B, C, Pass, Merit, Distinction, 2:1 etc.

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.

## **THE APPOINTMENT**

### ***Selection Process***

Candidates who demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria and if required, the desirable criteria will be invited to attend interview. It is anticipated that the interviews will be held in person at Progressive House week **commencing 23rd October 2023.** Please note that alternative dates are not available. A second stage interview process may be arranged for candidates who achieve the required standard during the first-round interview process.

### ***Principles of the Appointment***

NIPSO is committed to providing and promoting equality of opportunity and welcomes 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<sup>2</sup>, ethnic origin, colour or nationality, sexual orientation, disability, age, Trade Union membership or non- membership or criminal records<sup>3</sup>.

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 United Kingdom;
- 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 should be your current or most recent employer.

### ***Further Information***

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this document the word 'race' is to be understood, in accordance with the Race Relations (NI) Order, to include colour, race, nationality or ethnic origins. Irish Travellers are recognised under the Order as being members of a racial group.

<sup>3</sup> A person's criminal record will be viewed in the context of his/her overall job application, ability to do the job and the responsibility of employers for the care of other employees and children and young people. Only offences relevant to the post in question will be considered.

If you have any further queries regarding the recruitment and selection process then please email NIPSO's HR department via ([monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk)).

## **Section G – NIPSO Strategic Plan**

The NIPSO Strategic Plan 2022-25 may be accessed [here](#).

## **Section E – Terms & Conditions of Employment**

- The salary for this post is currently equivalent to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) EO11 scale £26,569 p.a. to £27,127 p.a.
- The post is based at NIPSO, Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN. NIPSO has a Hybrid Working Policy, i.e. a mix of working from home and from the office which will offer employees additional workstyle choices. Candidates should note that working exclusively from home will not be an option;
- The successful candidate will be eligible to join the NICS Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.
- 25 days annual leave plus 12 days public holidays on joining increasing to 30 days annual leave after 5 years' service.
- This post is full-time (37 hours per week), subject to a probationary period of 9 months.

## **Section F – Other Benefits of Working for NIPSO**

- Generous occupational sick pay and maternity leave/pay arrangements
- Flexitime scheme
- Work-life balance policies
- Access to Employee Assistance Programme/Occupational Health Consultant
- Support for ongoing training and development opportunities

