



Northern Ireland

**Public Services**  
Ombudsman

# About our Service

We are here to help. If you need advice about making a complaint please get in touch.



**Freephone**

0800 34 34 24



**nipso.org.uk**



**We investigate unresolved complaints about public services in Northern Ireland. We are independent of government, and our service is free.**

**If you have been treated unfairly by a public body, we may be able to help.**

We make decisions on each case by taking into account all the available facts and evidence.

We are not an advocacy agency (an agency that acts in favour of a particular person), but we do make sure that the rights of people who complain are respected.

Our aim is to help public services improve through our investigations and reports.

## How we deal with your complaint

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### Assessment



### Investigation



### Further Investigation

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#### Assessment:

We first check to see whether the organisation you have complained about is on a list of those we are legally able to investigate.

We also check whether you have already complained to the public body, and if it has finished dealing with your complaint.

We would not generally investigate if:

- you complain to us more than six months after the public body completed its complaints process
- you are simply unhappy with the policy of a public body, or;
- you intend to take the issue to court.

If we can't take your complaint forward, we'll write to you and give you information about what you can do next.

If we can look at it in more detail we will progress it to the Investigation stage.

#### Investigation:

We will look at any evidence you have given us and how you have been personally affected by what happened.

We try to help resolve complaints early, so at this stage we may ask if the organisation has any proposals for settling the case without the need for any further investigation.

If there is no evidence to support the complaint or allegation, or if your complaint seems to be about minor breaches of policy and procedure we may close your case at this stage.

If we have gathered enough information to make a decision on your complaint we will explain our findings to you.

We may decide the public body behaved fairly. However, we may also conclude that it delivered a service badly or failed to deliver a service. If so, we will ask it to put things right.

Most of the complaints we receive are determined at this stage. However in some cases we will need to progress your complaint to the Further Investigation before we can make a decision.

#### Further Investigation:

At this stage we might ask the public body for more information to help us understand what happened. We may also need to interview witnesses.

If your complaint is about a complex medical issue, we may get advice from an independent professional advisor.

We will look at the relevant policies and procedures available to the public body at the time, and refer to our Principles of Good Administration and Good Complaint Handling to help us work out what should have happened.

During our investigation our job is to be unbiased and fair. We will evaluate all the information and make a decision on your complaint. This will be explained in a report which will be sent to you and the public body.

If we think that a public body got things wrong we will say so. We may ask it to apologise or to make changes to the way it does things. In other cases, for example if you have been affected financially because of mistakes by a public body, then we can recommend it gives you your money back.

On the rare occasions our recommendations are not accepted we can send a special report to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

## Publishing our reports

To help others understand what we do we may produce a summary of the report for our website, case digest or Annual Report. These will not name individuals but will usually include the name of the public body.

## Our service standards:

We aim to:

- Acknowledge your correspondence within 3 working days of the date of its receipt
- Let you know within 10 working days of your complaint being received whether the assessment of your case has been completed
- Interview you by phone or arrange a face to face meeting where we believe this would be beneficial in considering your complaint
- Let you know within 50 working days of your complaint being received if it has been progressed for further investigation
- Let you know if we are unable to meet a target timescale and the reasons for this.
- We will also provide you with a revised timescale for response
- Explain your options if you disagree with our decision.

If we have referred your complaint to the Further Investigation stage, we aim to:

- Update you either by phone, email or letter approximately every 8 weeks on the progress of the investigation
- Agree a settlement or produce a draft report with our proposed findings and conclusions, within 50 weeks of informing you that your complaint was at this stage.

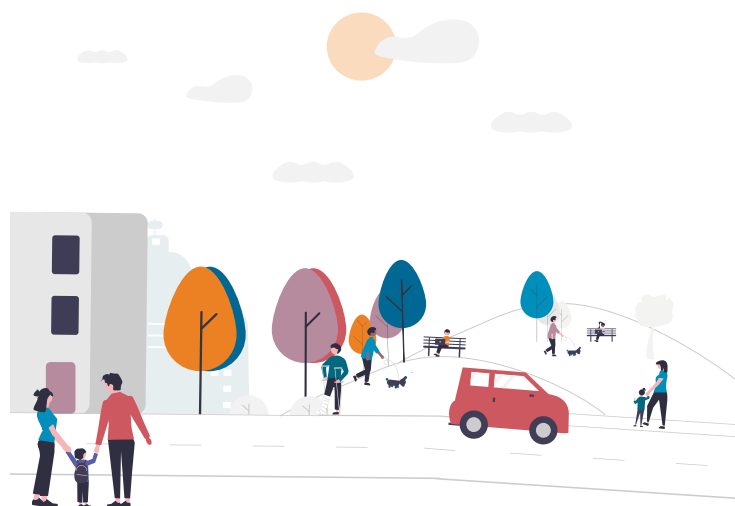
At all times we aim to treat you with respect and courtesy, and ask that you treat our staff in the same way.

## Data Protection & Confidentiality

We will collect your personal information in order to process your complaint. We conduct our investigations in private, and are committed to protecting all of the information we hold. Further details relating to our information handling can be found in our Privacy Notice.

## Complaints about our service

You have the right to make a complaint about us if you feel that the service you have received has fallen short of the standards you expect. If this is the case please see our Standards of Service complaints procedure on our website for more information.





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**Please contact us if you  
would like this form in  
another language or format  
(such as large print or Braille).**



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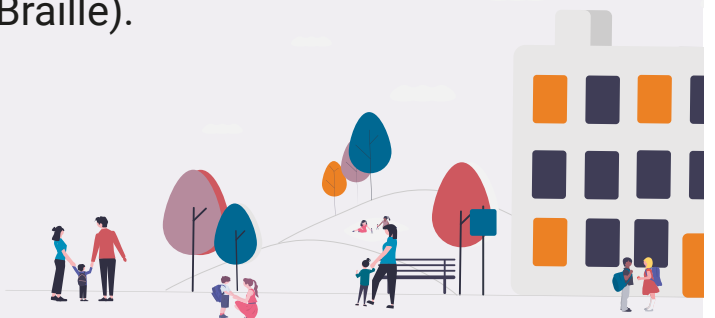
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