



Northern Ireland  
**Public Services**  
Ombudsman

# Senior Casework Officer

(Fixed-Term for a period of 12 months)

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Candidate Information Booklet (NIPSO/SCO/05-25)

2024

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## 1. MESSAGE FROM MARGARET KELLY, NI PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

Thank you for your interest in the position of Senior Casework 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 Senior Casework Officer, in a busy team undertaking assessments of complaints about public services or allegations that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct you will help provide individuals with access to justice through the independent investigation of unresolved complaints. The breadth of the jurisdiction of my office means that the work undertaken by a Senior Casework Officer is interesting and varied.

This is a challenging but interesting 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 over the past five years:

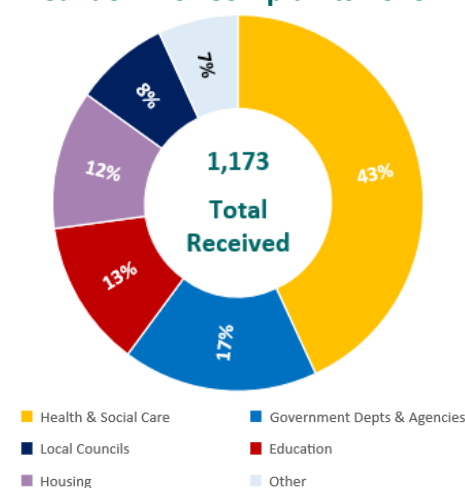
Year	Total	Year on Year % Change	Cumulative change since 2016-17
2019-20	1043	37%	94%
2020-21	927	22%	72%
2021-22	1211	59%	125%
2022-23	1046	37%	94%
2023-24	1173	54%	118%

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 2023-24<sup>1</sup>**



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.

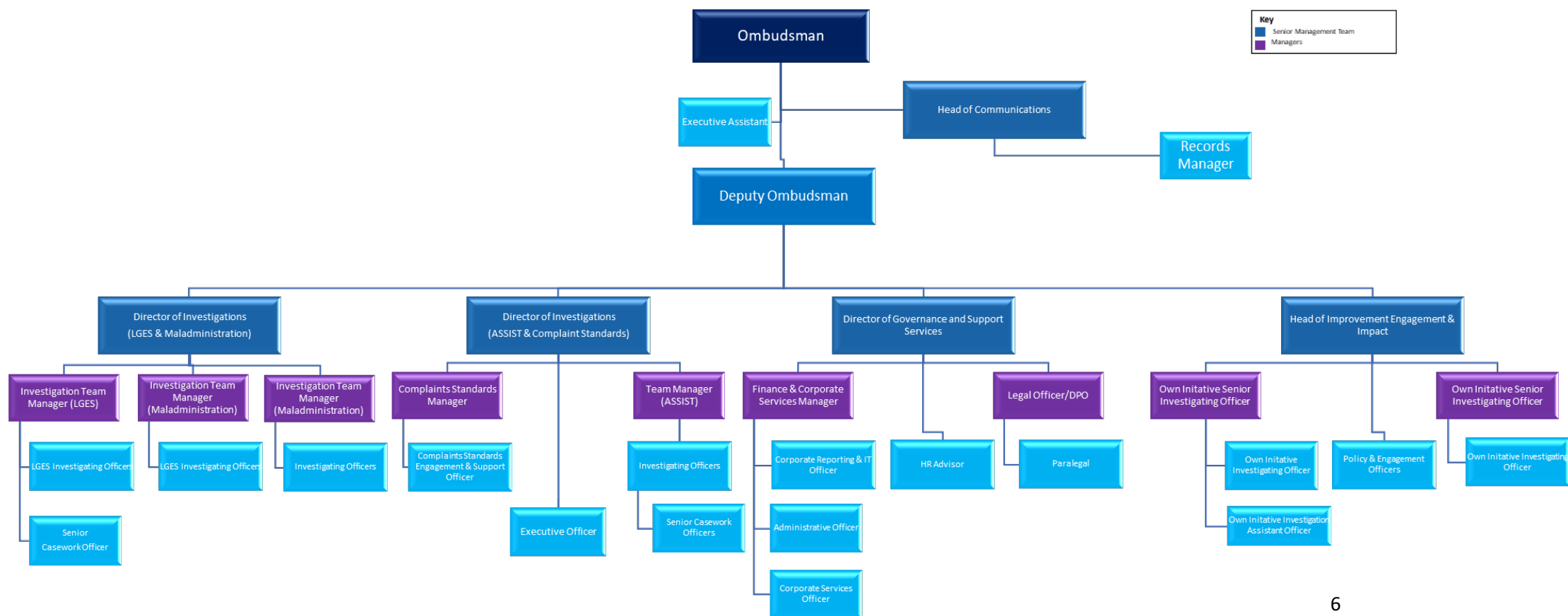
Interested candidates can read more about our future plans in our [Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025](#) and our annual performance in our latest [Annual Report & Accounts 2022-2023](#).

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

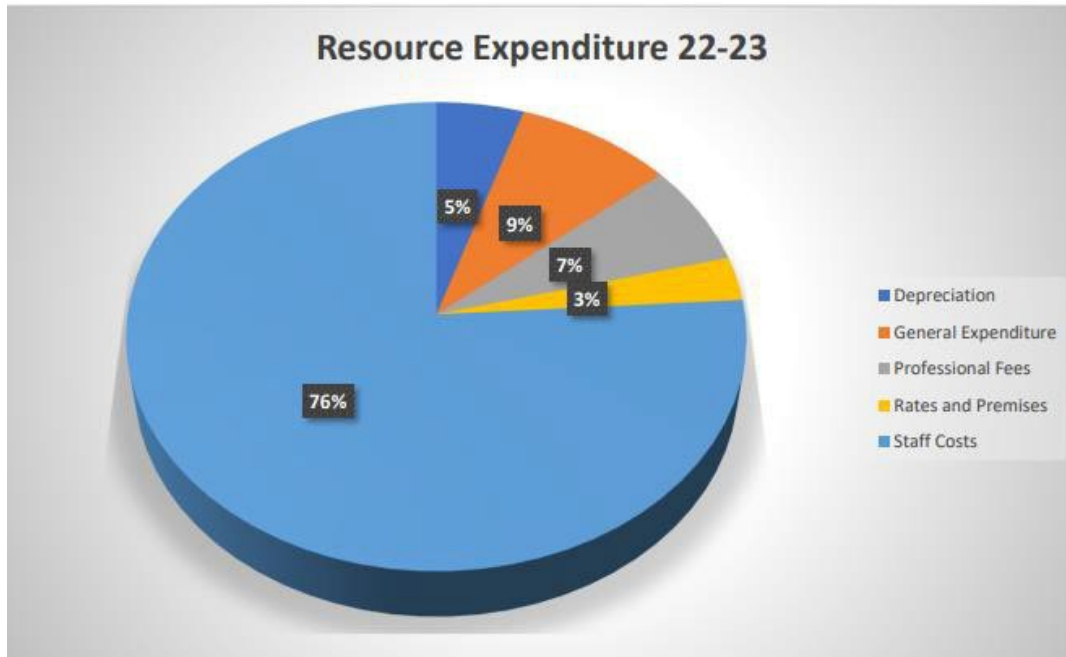
We treat people with respect and empathy and recognise and value individual experience. We are accessible and engage and explain our decision making.

#### 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 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

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**Job Title:** Senior Casework Officer

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

**Grade:** EOII

**Salary:** £27,897 - £28,483.

**Location:** Belfast

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### **Main purpose of job**

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

In addition, the SCO role provides administrative support to the investigation 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**

- Undertake an assessment of each case received within target timeframe to establish if the case should be accepted for investigation 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 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 Senior 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 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 independence, fairness, people focused and 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.
- 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 evolve. 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:

- 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 detailed written decisions. *(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

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:

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

## 9. WORKING FOR US

### Remuneration

The salary for this post is currently equivalent to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Executive Officer II which is £27,897 - £28,483.

### 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 a fixed term contract for a period of 12 months, 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](mailto:monitoringofficer@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 Monday 29<sup>th</sup> July 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 29<sup>th</sup> July 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.

Interviews are envisaged to take place during **week commencing 12<sup>th</sup> August 2024**. Further details of the process will be provided to candidates invited to participate in this process.

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](mailto:monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk))