



Northern Ireland
Public Services
Ombudsman

Making a Complaint

A helpful guide

**How to make a complaint to the Ombudsman
about public service providers in Northern Ireland.**

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](https://www.nipso.org.uk)**

What we do

We investigate unresolved complaints about public service providers in Northern Ireland. These include organisations in the following sectors:

-  **Health and Social Care**
-  **Housing**
-  **Education**
-  **Local Government**
-  **Central Government**

We are independent of government and our service is free.

You can complain to us if you feel you have been treated unfairly by a public body and your complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction.

Following an investigation we may decide the public body did nothing wrong. However, we may also conclude that it treated you unfairly, or delivered a service badly. If so, we will ask it to put things right.

What you can complain about

We deal with complaints about maladministration. Some of the things we call maladministration are:

- lack of care
- avoidable delay
- failure to follow the correct procedures
- unfairness, bias, or prejudice
- misleading or inadequate advice
- discourtesy and failure to apologise properly for errors
- mistakes in handling complaints

We also look at complaints about professional judgement and clinical decisions which have been made by health and social care professionals, eg doctors, nurses, social workers, etc.

What we cannot investigate

We can only deal with complaints about providers of public services.

We ask you to bring your complaint to us within six months of when you have completed the public body's complaint process, but will always look at reasons why this has not been possible.

The Ombudsman is an alternative to legal action, so if you have already begun legal action then we cannot take your complaint forward.

How we deal with your complaint

Our investigations are carried out in private and we will only share information with those who need to know.

Assessment

We first check to see if we are legally able to investigate the organisation you have complained about.

We also check if the organisation has finished dealing with your complaint.

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 in more detail, we will send it to the Investigation stage.

Investigation

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

We also usually need to contact the organisation you have complained about to get information from them.

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 further investigation.

From the evidence gathered we may decide the public body behaved fairly. However, if we conclude that it did not, we will ask it to put things right.

Most of the complaints we receive are resolved at this stage. However we may need to move a complaint to the Further Investigation stage before we can make a decision.

Further Investigation

At this stage we might ask the public body for more information and may also interview witnesses.

If your complaint is about professional judgement or a clinical decision, 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 to help us understand what should have happened.

During our investigation our job is to be unbiased and fair. Our decision 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 may ask it to apologise or to change the way it does things. If you have been affected financially because of mistakes by a public body then we can recommend it gives you your money back.



Publishing our reports

We publish some of our investigation reports on our website. This is to show what happens during our investigations and to help people understand how public bodies make decisions. These will not name individuals but will often include the name of the public body.

How to make a complaint

Step 1 You should first put your complaint to the organisation concerned using its complaints procedure.

Step 2 If you are still unhappy after the public body has completed the complaints process you can bring your complaint to us.

The quickest way for your complaint to be registered with us is by completing our online form. You can also contact us by phone, email or in writing.

If you would like to speak to a member of staff in person please call us to arrange an appointment.



Contacting us

You can contact us in the following ways:

Telephone: 028 9023 3821

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Post: **Freepost NIPSO, or;**
**The Northern Ireland Public Services
Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast BT1 6HN**





Northern Ireland
Public Services
Ombudsman

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



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