

14 October 2021

Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
Chair of NI Assembly Audit Committee
Room 254, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

[by e-mail]

Dear Daniel,

Re: NIPSO Annual Report and Accounts 2020-2021

I refer to your letter of 29 September 2021 seeking further information/clarification on 4 points in preparation for Committee's scrutiny of the NIPSO draft budget for 2022-2023. I will address the points in the order that they are raised in your letter.

Whether KPI 3 is likely to be achievable in the coming year given the increase in cases (Maladministration KPI performance - target 70%, achieved 68%)

On the basis of current performance it is expected that NIPSO will achieve the 70% target for KPI 3 in 2021-2022. NIPSO has seen a 20% increase in complaints year to date and this is leading to a significant increase in complaints progressing to the investigation stages of our process. On the basis of our forecasts we expect additional resources will be necessary to enable us to continue to meet this target in future years. I will therefore be making provision in my draft budget for additional investigative resources and I hope that the committee can support my request.

Details of any significant work being carried out to address the risk factors identified in relation to complaints handling performance (increase in complaints, staff turnover and inefficiencies, uncertainty over future years' resources and inability to mitigate future financial pressures)

NIPSO has undertaken a full review of our case handling process to ensure that it is efficient while remaining fair to both the complainant and the public body. A number of improvements have already been introduced from this review and further changes are being considered. NIPSO has recently introduced a new case handling system with an enhanced reporting capability which it is anticipated will assist with the monitoring of individual, team and organisational performance

In order to deal with issues regarding staff turnover NIPSO has introduced exit interviews for all staff at Investigating Officer grade who leave the office as well as providing a detailed and structured induction and mentoring programme for new staff. New staff who recently joined the office were also interviewed about their induction programme to assess effectiveness and so that improvements can be made for the future.

It is hoped that by moving to a three year budget cycle the uncertainty created by single year budgets will be removed and NIPSO will make more effective decisions to deal with the increased demands placed on our service

Whether COVID-19 alone was responsible for KPI 5 not being met (LGES KPI performance – target 60%, achieved 50%)

A number of factors affected the KPI 5 performance during 2020-2021. The impact of Covid 19 was the primary reason for KPI 5 not being met. The LGES team is a small team and the school closures, the pressures of homeschooling and the disruption to informal and formal childcare in particular had a disproportionate impact on the staff as well as the overall move to home working. The team also experienced issues with staff turnover and a reduction in the resources available.

In relation to financial performance it is stated that all three established KPIs were achieved. However, in relation to KPI 8, the target was 98% but it is stated that 97% was achieved

In relation to KPI 8 the performance achieved by NIPSO was 97% as stated in the annual report and accounts. The narrative explaining NIPSO's financial performance is clearly incorrect and should have stated that two of our KPI's for financial performance were achieved and that we narrowly failed to meet our target in relation to the payment of invoices. I would ask the Committee to accept my apology for this error.

I trust that the information provided is to the satisfaction of the Committee and I will be happy to answer any further question when I present my draft budget to the Committee on the 3 November 2021.

Yours sincerely



MARGARET KELLY
Ombudsman



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Audit Committee

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29 September 2021

Margaret Kelly,
Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Issued via email to: Margaret.Kelly@nipso.org.uk

Dear Margaret

Annual Report and Accounts 2020-2021

At its meeting on 29 September 2021, the Audit Committee considered the *Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman: Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2021*.

In preparation for its scrutiny of the forthcoming NIPSO draft budget, the Committee agreed to seek further information/clarification on a number of issues:

- Whether KPI 3 is likely to be achievable in the coming year given the increase in cases (Maladministration KPI performance - target 70%, achieved 68%);
- Details of any significant work being carried out to address the risk factors identified in relation to complaints handling performance (increase in complaints, staff turnover and inefficiencies, uncertainty over future years' resources and inability to mitigate future financial pressures);
- Whether COVID-19 alone was responsible for KPI 5 not being met (LGES KPI performance – target 60%, achieved 50%);
- In relation to financial performance it is stated that all three established KPIs were achieved. However, in relation to KPI 8, the target was 98% but it is stated that 97% was achieved.

Audit Committee
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I would appreciate a response by 14 October 2021.

Yours sincerely

Daniel McCrossan MLA

Chairperson, Audit Committee

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