

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Complaints Policy and Procedure

For information on submissions in alternative formats e.g. hard copy, large print, Braille, audio cassette, and/or any adjustment requirements that ensure equality of opportunity, please call 028 9052 1137. The Textphone number is: 028 9052 1209.

Statement of Principle

We hope that things don't go wrong with our staff and services, but if they do, we welcome all feedback and use it as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and improve our services. We will provide full and constructive responses to any complaints we receive.

Our approach to complaints handling is guided by The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's values of public service, professionalism and one team.

Aims and objectives

This policy will:

- Provide an easy way for members of the public to complain about Northern Ireland Assembly staff or services;
- Allow us to record and report on complaints so that we can monitor trends and take appropriate action; and
- Encourage our staff to discuss complaints received within their teams and agree changes to practice where this is appropriate.

Scope of the Complaints Procedure

The Complaints Procedure covers complaints from members of the public about Northern Ireland Assembly staff, services and/or perceived failures in complying with the Assembly's Equality Scheme.

What you can complain about

- Our failure to provide a service;
- Inadequate standard of service; and
- Northern Ireland Assembly policies.

What you can't complain about

- Decisions of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- MLAs or their staff;
- Executive Ministers;
- Executive Departmental policy; or
- The merits of decisions taken by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission acting within its legal powers.

For information on complaining about these matters, please contact our Complaints Officer on 028 9052 1137.

This policy does not cover complaints from members of Assembly staff relating to their employment, or from contractors providing services to the Assembly – separate procedures are available in both cases.

Complaints about the behaviour of, treatment by or attitude of a member of Assembly staff may be made to the Commissioner for Standards. Further information may be found at (insert link to Commissioner's pages).

What is a complaint?

A complaint is any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction by any person about the services, actions or inactions of the Northern Ireland Assembly or its officers which requires a response.

How to make a complaint

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Raise the matter with the official you have been dealing with who will do all they can to resolve the matter informally.

If this is not possible, then the process moves to the Second Stage. At this point, you should contact the Northern Ireland Assembly Complaints Officer in the way that is most appropriate for you.

Contact details and more information on this are provided later in this document.

Stage 2 - Investigation and response

Once the Complaints Officer has been contacted, he or she will be your sole point of contact throughout the complaints process, unless your complaint is referred to the Assembly Commission's Equality Manager (see below).

The Complaints Officer will acknowledge your complaint, and will forward it to the relevant Director, who will appoint an officer to investigate.

We will provide a full response within 20 working days of receipt of your complaint; but if this is not possible, we will keep you updated on our progress within 20 working days and issue our full response as soon as possible after that.

If a complaint is made concerning a perceived failure to comply with our Equality Scheme, the complaint will not be dealt with under the Complaints Policy but rather it will be forwarded to the Assembly's Equality Manager who will investigate the complaint and become the sole point of contact, keeping you fully informed of the procedures for dealing with the complaint under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). Please visit the Equality Scheme for more information.

If we think that your complaint should be dealt with by another organisation, we will tell you as soon as possible. We will also tell you who that other organisation is if possible but we can't forward it on your behalf.

Information on submitting complaints can be found at the end of this document.

Stage 3 - Appeal

If you are unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you can ask for it to be reviewed by the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly. We will provide information on how to do this in our initial response to you.

The Chief Executive will investigate your case and respond to you within 20 working days. If a full response is not possible within this timescale, we will keep you updated on our progress within 20 working days and issue a full response as soon as possible after that.

The Chief Executive's decision is final. However, where a complaint relates to an alleged failure by us to comply with our Equality Scheme, and you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the Chief Executive's decision, you can refer the matter to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. (7-9 Shaftsbury Square, Belfast BT2 7DP; telephone 028 90 500 600; email: information@equalityni.org)

External review - The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

After we have fully investigated your complaint and you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask NIPSO to review it.

If you decide to do this, we will provide you with a written notice which states:

- that our complaints process has been exhausted;
- that you can refer the matter to NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied with our response;
- the time limit for making such a referral; and
- how to contact NIPSO.

We will do this within two weeks of the day on which the internal complaints process is exhausted.

Contact details for NIPSO are:

Telephone: 02890 233821 or **Freephone** 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Text Phone: 028 9089 7789

Post: Freepost NIPSO
The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
BELFAST
BT1 6HN

Important information to help us with your complaint

You should make your complaint as soon as possible after you first become aware of the matters you are complaining about and, in any event, within six months of that time. We may consider a complaint made outside that time depending on the circumstances of the complaint.

In order for us to fully investigate your complaint, you should give us as much information about the issue as possible and provide copies of any supporting evidence you refer to in the complaint. We will only use this information in relation to the specific complaint you have lodged. If you have any queries regarding the information you give us, please contact the Complaints Officer.

Because we will need information and a contact email, it is not possible to investigate anonymous complaints. However, if you wish, someone else may act for you. We will ask the person claiming to be acting on your behalf to provide proof that they are authorised to act in this way.

Our commitment to confidentiality

When we receive complaints about our services, we hold these and any related correspondence on a shared directory, access to which is password protected. Only the Complaints Officer and those relevant to the investigation and management of complaints have access to this; this ensures that any sensitive material is held securely.

Personal data associated with a complaint is never disclosed further or processed for any other purpose other than the complaint. We will retain your personal data until we are satisfied your complaint is resolved.

Reporting and review

The Northern Ireland Assembly's Secretariat Management Group (SMG) will receive regular reports from the Complaints Officer on the implementation of the complaints procedures, including data on the nature and volume of complaints received. These reports will normally be published on the Northern Ireland Assembly website, in line with our Publication Scheme.

The Assembly Commission will also receive an annual summary report detailing the numbers and categories of complaints received in the previous year. The report will include any improvements made to the policy or procedures.

How complaints can be submitted

- Email – Complete and submit a complaint form to nia.co@niassembly.gov.uk
- Post - Print out a complaint form and post to The Complaints Officer, Room B4, Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Ballymiscaw, Belfast BT4 3XX
- Telephone - 9052 1137 and ask for the Complaints Officer.
- For information on submissions in alternative formats e.g. large print, Braille, audio cassette, and/or any adjustment requirements that ensure equality of opportunity, please call 9052 1137.

The complaint form is available to download in the following formats:

- Download the form in PDF
- Download the form in Microsoft Word (DOCX)
- Download the form in Rich Text Format (RTF)
- Download the form in Open Document Format (ODT)