

Complaints Policy

And associated Procedure

Produced by the Strategic Planning and Customer Engagement Directorate
Business Services Organisation
2 Franklin Street, Belfast, BT2 8DQ

Reference No:

Title:	BSO Complaints Policy		
Author(S):	Darren Sessions		
Ownership:	Directorate of Strategic Planning and Customer Engagement		
Approval By:	BSO Board	Approval Date:	28/11/2025
Operational Date:	01/01/2026	Next Review:	01/01/2029
Version No.	1.0	Supersedes:	-
Key Words:	Complaints, Responsibility, Early Resolution, Investigation, Stage 1 & 2		
Director Responsible:	Director of Strategic Planning and Customer Engagement		
Lead Author:	Darren Sessions		
Lead Author Position:	BSO Complaints & Whistleblowing Manager		
Additional Author(s):	N/A		
Contact Details:	complaints.bso@hscni.net		
Links to other Policies:	Guidance In Relation To The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Model Complaints Handling Procedure		
	BSO Disciplinary Procedure		
	BSO Grievance Policy		
	BSO Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy		
	BSO Management of Violence and Aggression Policy		

Contents

A Quick Guide to our Complaints Procedure.....	1
Introduction	2
Policy Principles	2
Defining a Complaint.....	3
Who Cannot Access the Complaints Policy?	3
Who Can Make a Complaint?	3
What Can I Complain About?	4
What Can I NOT Complain About?	5
Timescales in relation to complaints?	5
How Do I Make a Complaint?.....	6
Getting Help to make A Complaint	6
Complaints Handling procedure	7
STAGE 1 – Frontline Response	7
STAGE 2 – Formal Investigation & Response	8
What If I Am Still Dissatisfied?	8
Post-closure Contact.....	9
Appendix 1 – Section 75 Complaints	10

A Quick Guide to our Complaints Procedure

Complaints Procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by telephone, by email, in writing or by using our online complaints form

We have a 2 stage complaints procedure. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly, but if it is clear that the matter will need in-depth investigation, we will talk to you about this. We will agree a way forward and keep you updated on our progress.

Stage 1: Frontline Response

We will always try to respond to your complaint quickly (**within 5 working days**) if possible. If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2.

Stage 2: Investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1. We will also look at other complaints at this stage, if following discussion and agreement with you, it is clear that an in-depth investigation is needed. We will acknowledge your complaint within **3 working days**, confirm the issues of complaint and what outcome you want to achieve.

We will investigate your complaint and provide you with our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days**, unless there is clearly a good reason for requiring more time to complete.

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you still remain dissatisfied with either our decision or the way in which we have handled your complaint, you can ask NIPSO to consider it. NIPSO will assess whether there is evidence of a service failure or maladministration not identified by us which requires further investigation.

Introduction

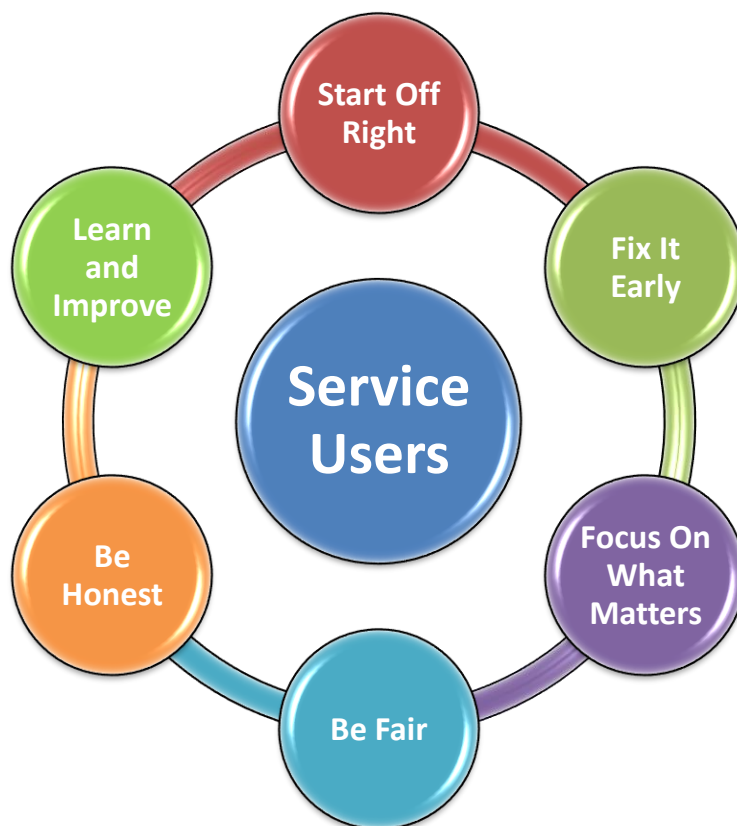
The Business Services Organisation (BSO) is committed to listening to our service users, understanding their experiences, and responding to their concerns in an effective way. We are also committed to embedding and maintaining an accessible, transparent, robust and effective complaints policy and process to ensure learning opportunities are acted upon both specifically and corporately, improvements are implemented promptly to reduce the risk of recurrence and service users who experience failings and raise complaints are listened to and treated fairly and properly.

There may be occasions when you feel a service has fallen below the standard expected or you are dissatisfied with a service that has been provided. When this occurs, we want to hear from you so that we can improve the services provided by the BSO.

This policy is intended to explain the standard operation of the complaints procedure within BSO, how we will deal with your complaint and what you can expect from us.

Policy Principles

Our Service users are at the core of what we strive to achieve as an organisation. The BSO is committed to the following principles to ensure the effective handling of complaints.



In conjunction with the above, we are also committed to ensuring that our complaints process is;

- accessible and open by providing flexible options for pursuing a complaint and effective support for those wishing to do so.
- Responsive by providing an appropriate timely and proportionate response.

Defining a Complaint

In line with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure, a complaint is defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the BSO’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of a service provided by or on behalf of the BSO.”

Who Cannot Access the Complaints Policy?

- **Staff** – Staff should ordinarily deal with issues through line management processes or the Staff grievance Procedure except on occasions where they experience issues as a BSO service user. Staff can however use this policy to raise a Section 75 complaint, details can be found in [Appendix 1](#)
- **Client Organisations** – Performance issues should ordinarily be dealt with through normal business processes.
- **Litigants / Legal Action** – The BSO will not consider complaints where a complainant states that they intend to take or have commenced legal actions against the BSO.

Who Can Make a Complaint?

- Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by the services, or a service contracted or commissioned by the BSO.
- A visitor or user of BSO facilities.
- A representative or appropriately authorised person (e.g. Relative, friend advocate or adviser) acting on behalf of a BSO service or facilities user. In instances where a representative is making a complaint on behalf of someone else, we will require confirmation of the complainants written consent.

The BSO acknowledge that a complainant may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint themselves, if for example, it is from a minor or a person suffering from an illness or other incapacity. The BSO will accept a complaint on their behalf on the basis that consent has been received.

- A person who uses the HSC Pension Services. Complainants in this regard may also have the right to access the services of the Pensions Ombudsman.
- A person who uses Family Practitioner Services. Complainants may also have the right to access the services of the Patient and Client Council.
- Practitioners who may be subject to an investigation under Counter Fraud and Probity arrangements may be able to use the complaints procedure, subject to other legal considerations and only about the administration of an investigation.
- Practitioners who may wish to complain about decisions of prior approval processes may complain but only after the exhaustion of all appropriate process and solely about the administration process.
- An employee of the BSO, may also use the complaints process, but only when it is about services or actions of the BSO which they experience as a service user.

Anonymous Complaints

The BSO will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, we recognise that our complaints procedure must be flexible to allow for anonymous complaints to be made in exceptional circumstances where the complaint identifies systemic issues of concern, there is sufficient evidence available to enable further enquiries and where it is appropriate to do so.

What Can I Complain About?

The complaint should relate to something for which the BSO has responsibility:

- Failure or refusal to provide a service
- Inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
- Dissatisfaction with one of our policies or the impact it has had on the individual
- Failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering a service
- Conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (except where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves)
- A concern about the actions or service of the BSO when delivering services on behalf of another organisation (where the matter is based on the instructions the BSO receive from another body, the complainant will be appropriately signposted to the commissioning organisation)
- Disagreement with a decision (except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals

- process)
- Dissatisfaction with how an element of a decision was administered

What Can I NOT Complain About?

There are certain matters outside the scope of the complaints handling procedures where they are governed by other legislative processes or have distinct or separate mechanisms to handle complaints:

- A routine first-time request for a service or reporting of a fault
- A request for compensation only
- Issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or tribunal and where that process has been dealt with the issues raised in the complaint and the court or tribunal has the ability to provide the appropriate remedy in relation to the matters raised in the complaint
- Disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision (such as Freedom of Information requests), or an established appeals process followed (such as planning)
- A request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Northern Ireland) Acts and requests for reviews of decisions under these statutory regimes.
- A grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment (staff should consult the relevant policy e.g. Grievance policy)
- A concern raised internally by a member of staff which was not about a service they have received such as a whistleblowing concern (staff should consult the Raising Concerns in the Public Interest Policy). Staff can however use this policy to raise a Section 75 complaint, details can be found in [Appendix 1](#)

Timescales in relation to complaints?

The BSO encourages complainants to make their complaints as soon as practically possible following the event giving rise to it as investigations will inevitably be more effective when memories and events are recent and corrective action can be implemented sooner.

The BSO will permit a complaint being raised with the organisation up to 6 months after the event occurring or within 6 months of the complainant becoming aware of the issue.

Complaints made outside these timescales will be considered at the discretion of the Director of Strategic Planning & Customer Engagement where:

- It would be unreasonable in the circumstances of a particular case for the complaint to have been made earlier, and where it is still possible to investigate the facts of the case e.g. where issues such as bereavement, poor health, communication difficulties or limited support have delayed the

complaint; and/or

- There is a risk to public or patient safety

Complainants that have their complaints refused due to an excessive delay in raising it will be advised that they may request the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman to consider it.

How Do I Make a Complaint?

Issues are often easier to resolve when made directly to the service area concerned when they arise, or as soon after as possible.

Complaints can be made in person, by telephone, by post, by email or by using our online complaints form.

Online: <https://hrca.hscni.net/concern-complaint-form/>

Email: complaints.bso@hscni.net

Telephone: 02895 360698

In person or in writing: Business Services Organisation
2 Franklin Street
Belfast
BT2 8DQ

When making a complaint it is important to tell us:

- Your full name and contact details
- Details about your complaint
- What has gone wrong; and
- What outcome you are seeking

The BSO manages your personal data in accordance with its duties and responsibilities under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Further details can be found in our Privacy policy: [BSO-Complaints-Privacy-Notice.pdf](#)

Getting Help to make A Complaint

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equality duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, please tell us in person, contact us on 02895 360698 or email us at complaints.bso@hscni.net

The BSO have also taken steps to ensure our complaints process is accessible to you please contact the complaints office if you require any of the following resources to assist with making a complaint to the BSO.

Easy Read Complaints Guidance
Sign Language Complaints Guidance
Alternative Language Complaint Guidance
How to Request an Interpreter

If you would like to discuss your accessibility requirements or have any questions please contact the complaints office on the details above,

Interpretation and/or translation services are also available free of charge for those who may require them. Should this be required please contact the complaints office at complaints.bso@hscni.net for assistance.

Other support agencies are available to assist you with making a complaint such as the Patient Client Council, who can be contacted on 0800 917 0222, via email at info@pcc-ni.net or by using their [Online Contact Form](#)

Complaints Handling procedure

In line with NIPSO MCHP, the BSO operates a two stage complaints procedure. We will aim to resolve complaints at the point of service delivery in the first instance. This will be achieved through prompt and direct engagement with you and with the involvement of the level of management that is required.

STAGE 1 – Frontline Response

What you can expect from us at Stage 1:

The BSO endeavour to respond to complaints quickly when first informed about an issue. This would be by providing an on-the-spot apology and appropriate explanation when something has gone wrong or by taking immediate action to resolve a problem.

- We will respond within 5 working days from the date we receive your complaint, unless there are exceptional circumstances for us not being able to facilitate this. In such circumstances, a short extension (up to 5 working days) may be necessary. Where this is the case, the BSO will tell you the reason for the extension and when you can expect to receive a response.
- We will investigate and outline for you, the agreed outcome/actions taken to resolve your complaint.
- If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, your complaint can be escalated to Stage 2.

You must ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2 and outline what you expect from a further review. This must be requested either within **6 months of the event** you wish to complain about or within **30 days of receiving your Stage 1 response** (whichever is latest).

STAGE 2 – Formal Investigation & Response

A Stage 2 investigation would be appropriate where:

- you are dissatisfied with our Stage 1 response or wish for your complaint to be investigated
- your complaint is complex and cannot be resolved within the Stage 1 timescales or;
- your complaint relates to serious, high risk or high-profile issues.

A formal investigation in these instances aims to explore your complaint in more depth, establish all of the facts relevant to the case and formally respond to your concerns.

What you can expect from us at Stage 2:

- Formal acknowledgement of your complaint within 3 working days from it being received
- Confirmation of our understanding of your complaint and the outcome you are looking for
- Resolution of your complaint where possible
- A full written response to your complaint from the Director responsible for the service to which your complaint relates no later than 20 working days from your complaint being received – unless an extension to this timeframe is required. Where this happens to be the case, our complaints office will provide you with the reason for the extension, when you should expect to receive a response and keep you updated on the progress.
- Confirmation of the outcome/actions taken to resolve your complaint.

What If I Am Still Dissatisfied?

Once we have provided you with our final decision/outcome and you remain dissatisfied with either our decision or the way in which we managed your complaint, you can ask the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) to consider it for you.

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) is the final stage for complaints about the majority of public services in Northern Ireland. This includes complaints about the BSO. NIPSO is an independent organisation that investigates complaints. The service provided by NIPSO is free. It is not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

If you remain dissatisfied when you have considered this response, you can ask NIPSO to look at your complaint. NIPSO generally expect complaints to be brought to it:

- within 6 months since you received correspondence from the BSO informing you that the complaints handling procedure is complete and of your right to refer your complaint to NIPSO.

NIPSO will generally ask service users to provide details of their complaint and a copy of the final response from the organisation. You can do this online, by telephone or in person.

NIPSO's contact details are:

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
33 Wellington Place,
Belfast, BT1 6HN

Tel: Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk

Post-closure Contact

Where you contact us for clarification following receipt of a final response, it is permissible to have further discussion with you to clarify a response and answer your questions. This can be used as a further opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to improvement and learning. This is not an opportunity to reopen the complaint or ask for a new investigation.

If you are dissatisfied with our response or you do not accept the investigation findings, we will explain that we have already given our final response on the matter and signpost you to NIPSO.

Appendix 1 – Section 75 Complaints

The Business Services Organisation (BSO) are responsive to the views of members of the public. We will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us.

Schedule 9 paragraph 10 of the Act refers to complaints. A person can make a complaint to a public authority if the complainant believes he or she may have been directly affected by an alleged failure of the authority to comply with its approved equality scheme.

If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, the complaint can be brought to the Equality Commission.

A person wishing to make a complaint that the BSO has failed to comply with its approved equality scheme should contact:

The BSO Complaints & Whistleblowing Manager
Business Services Organisation
2 Franklin Street
Belfast
BT2 8DQ

Email: complaints.bso@hscni.net

Tel: 02895 360698

We will in the first instance acknowledge receipt of each complaint within 3 working days.

The BSO will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and will respond substantively to the complainant within one (1) month of the date of receiving the letter of complaint. Under certain circumstances, if the complexity of the matter requires a longer period, the period for response to the complainant may be extended to two (2) months. In those circumstances, the complainant will be advised of the extended period within one month of making the complaint.

During this process the complainant will be kept fully informed of the progress of the investigation into the complaint and of any outcomes.

In any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission, the BSO will co-operate fully, providing access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the Equality Commission may require.

Similarly, the BSO will co-operate fully with any investigation by the Equality Commission under sub-paragraph 11 (1) (b) of Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The BSO will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full any recommendations arising out of any Commission investigation.