



NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

COVID-19 UPDATE

24 March 2020

Dear Chief Executive,

I write to offer the support of all at NIPSO to you and your staff during these very difficult times. I also wanted to update you on NIPSO's current position in relation to complaints and investigations.

We have closed our office to the public and our staff are now working from home. We have made preparations which will allow us to operate as full a service as possible, however during this period all contact with our Office should be made through our central telephone number 0800 343424 or our central email address nipso@nipso.org.uk.

I recognise that our health and social care services and staff are currently facing extraordinary and unprecedented pressures. Please be in no doubt that this Office understands that your focus at present is on preparing for the escalation of the current situation, minimising the health risks posed by the virus and on providing essential public services.

I realise there will be decisions to be made on how your organisation handles complaints through this period. If it would be of assistance we will be available to provide general advice and support to your teams which may help manage complainants' expectations and minimise workload at a later stage.

We will be advising people who may have a complaint or who may be considering making a complaint, related to COVID-19 or otherwise, to recognise the current pressures and to reflect carefully on whether it is necessary to do so at this time.

We are also considering how best to prioritise our own case work and how we deal with newly received complaints about public bodies. I would like to reassure you that we will respond flexibly should responses to our enquiries create difficulties or unreasonable pressures on your teams.

In these circumstances I would encourage your teams to contact us so that we can discuss any issues on a case by case basis. We will keep our position under review as things develop and my Office has been – or will shortly be - in contact with your complaints teams to discuss how we proceed.

Again, we would like to send our support to you and your staff during this very difficult period.

Yours sincerely,



Paul McFadden

Acting Ombudsman

Cc:

Richard Pengelly (Department of Health)

Conrad Kirkwood (Department of Health)

Brian Godfrey (Department of Health)

Valerie Watts (Health and Social Care Board)

Olive MacLeod (Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority)

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