



Northern Ireland

Public Services
Ombudsman

Social Care Managers Forum
3rd and 6th June 2025
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Northern Ireland

Public Services
Ombudsman

**Complaint Standards -
One set of complaint handling procedures for
public bodies and commissioned services**



About NIPSO

- NIPSO has legal powers to investigate unresolved complaints about public services.
- It provides a free, independent and impartial service for people who remain dissatisfied at the end of a public body's complaints process.



WHO IS THE OMBUDSMAN?

The Northern Ireland Assembly nominated Margaret Kelly as the new Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman in July 2020. Her post is for a single period of seven years (from August 2020).

Margaret is also the Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner for Standards (NILGCS). She has taken on the additional role of Complaints Standards Authority for public services in Northern Ireland

Margaret has extensive experience in the community and voluntary sector and working with Public Bodies.

Complaints to NIPSO increasing each year

Health & Social Care complaints continue to account for almost half of our total complaints received

126

complaints about
other health providers 23-24

377

complaints about
HSC Trusts 23-24



What is Complaint Standards?

*A set of principles and procedures which explain to organisations delivering **public services** how they should deal with complaints. This includes not only public bodies but independent organisations and charities in private, community & voluntary sectors delivering public funded services.*

What does this mean in your setting?

NIPSO will publish a Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for the Health and Social Care (HSC) sector.

It will replace the current DoH Complaint Procedure Directions and will be a statutory requirement for organisations delivering contracts on behalf of HSC to comply with the procedure.



Background to Complaint Standards



**NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES
OMBUDSMAN (NI) ACT 2016**



PUBLIC CONSULTATION



OTHER JURISDICTIONS



Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for Health and Social Care (HSC)

Why is this happening?

- We want all public bodies to handle complaints in broadly the same way.
- The Health & Social Care MCHP will establish a consistent and simplified approach to complaints handling across public services in Northern Ireland.
- NIPSO wants to ensure that when someone wishes to complain about a public service, they will be able to understand how to make a complaint and the level of service to expect when they do complain.



Valuing Complaints

No one likes to receive a complaint, but complaints are valuable feedback – and can help us learn about our service and how we might improve what we do. Valuing complaints helps us:

- Learn where things might be going wrong
- Provides evidence for the need for changes
- Can help reduce future complaints
- Prevents issues from escalating
- Builds trust between the service provider and residents / families.



Complaint Standards is underpinned by the below Statement of Principles

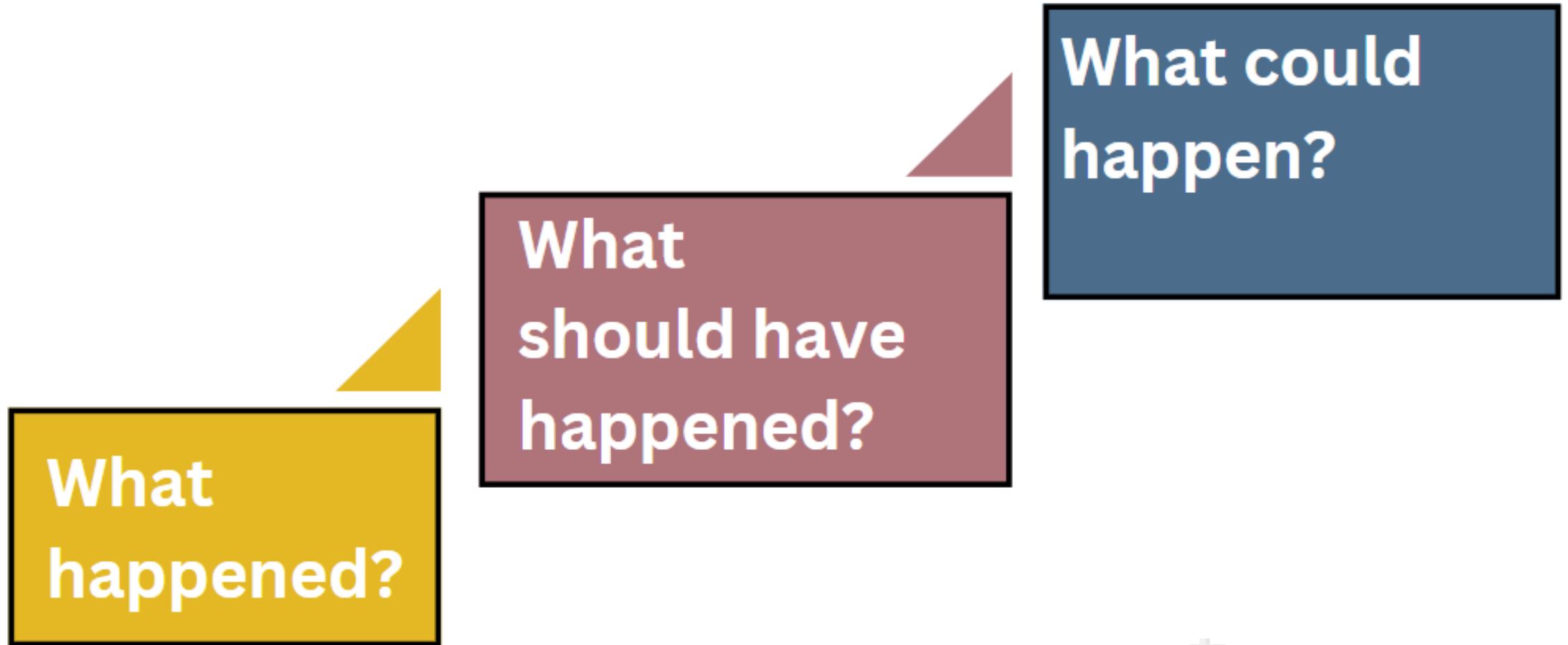


The Statement of Principles

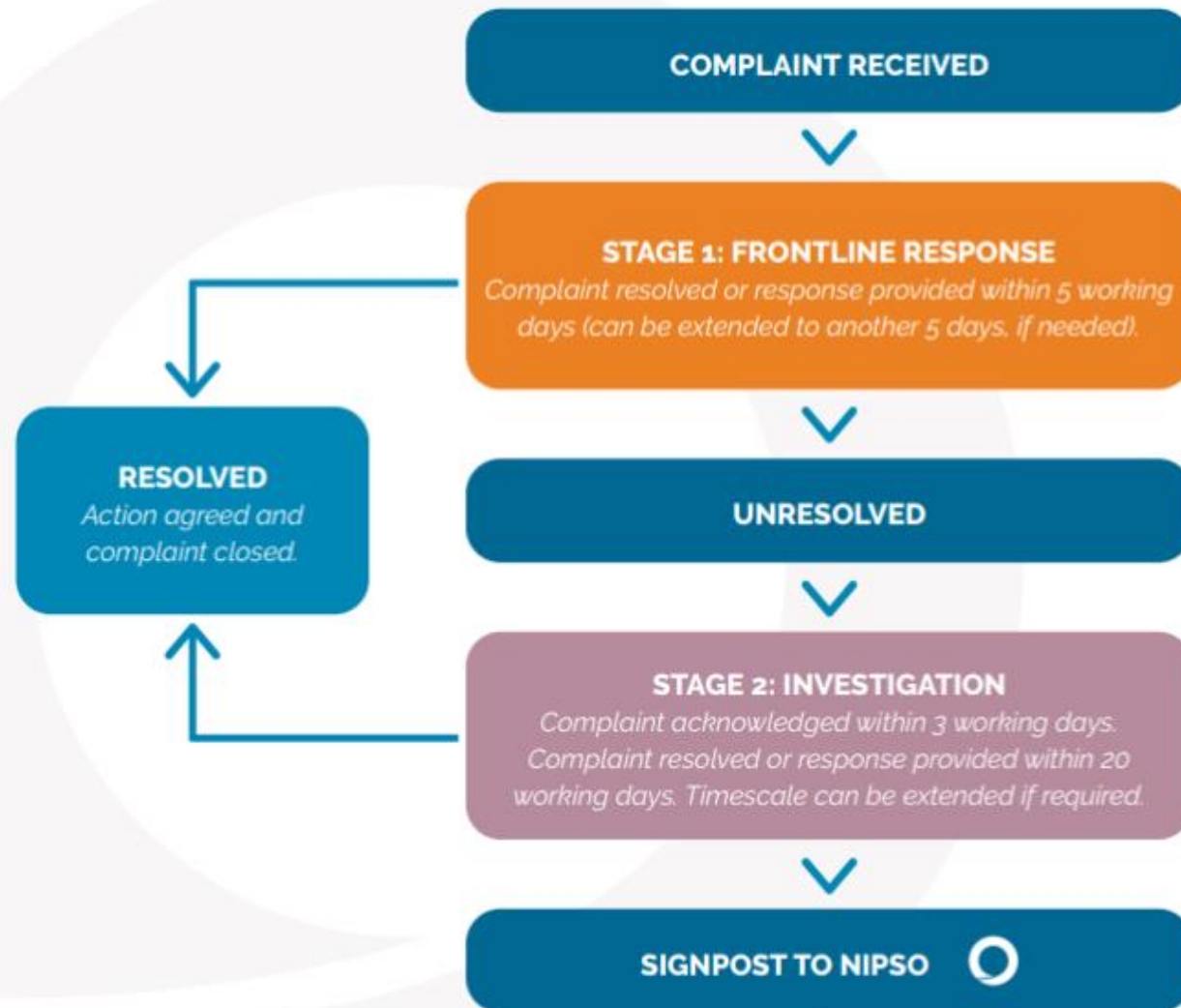
The Statement of Principles are overarching basic principles that public bodies' complaints handling procedures should reflect and comply with. These principles aim to help drive a focus on the early resolution of complaints and promote the use of complaints information for learning and improvement.



Complaints as Learning Opportunities



The Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP)



Who to complain to?



- Complaints Standards hopes to clarify the complaint process for complainants but also for practitioners and others in the system.
- For example – the family of a resident in a Care Home may be unsure who to approach.
- Under the MCHP - complaints about a Care Home go to the Care Home in the first instance.
- The Care Home can then sign-post the family or involve another agency if needed



7 Key elements of the MCHP

- An agreed definition of what is a complaint
- Designated timeframes within each stage
- Two stages: Stage 1 - Frontline Response (5 days) *complaint resolved or response provided*
Stage 2 - Investigation (20 days) *complaint resolved or response provided*
- Recording, reporting and publishing of complaints data
- Requirement to learn from complaints for service improvement
- Ensure information on how to complain is widely published
- Provide support to address barriers to making a complaint



NIPSO Resources

- Dedicated resource within the Engagement Team to connect with services to help raise awareness and understanding
- Dedicated Complaints Standards Team to help support implementation
- Best practice guides, Training Videos and Online Learning modules
- Best Practice Networks under consideration for H&SC sector



Good Complaints Handling should include ..

Early engagement

Manage expectations

Good communication skills

Empathy

Public confidence –
be honest and fair

Don't be overly
defensive

Keep complainants
updated

Demonstrate how
things have
improved

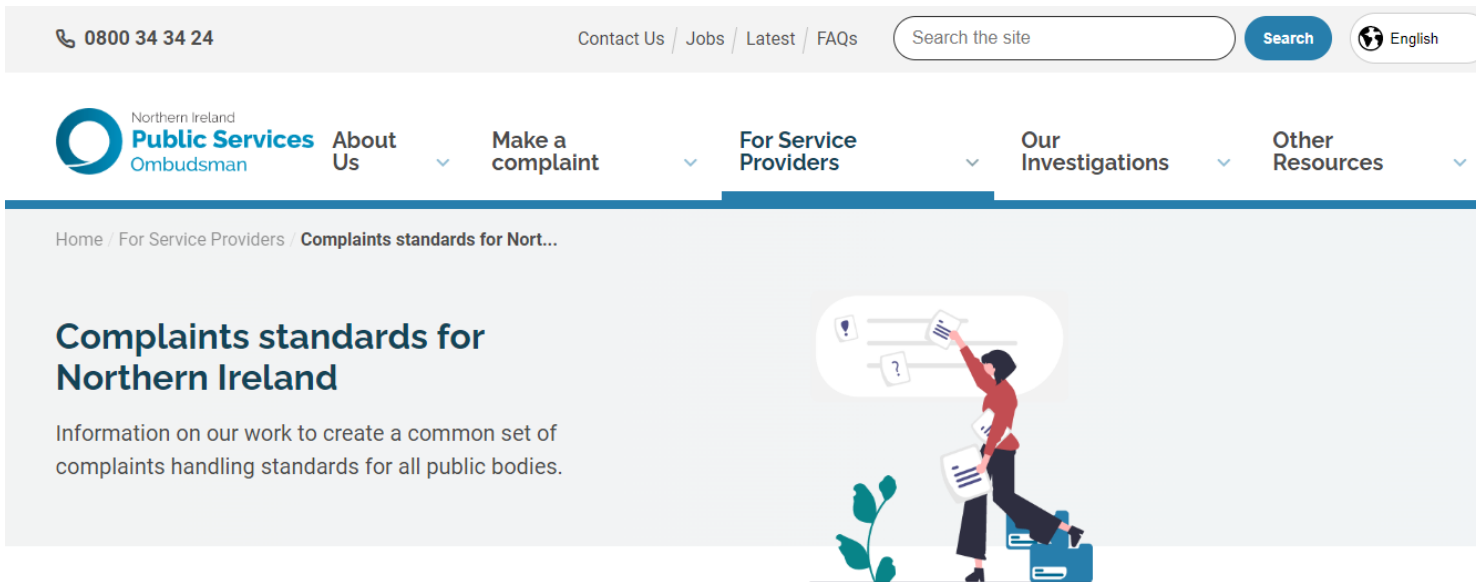
Seek support
Take time to de-brief
with colleagues



Complaints Standards information and resources available on NIPSO's website:

Click on this link: Complaints standards for Northern Ireland | NIPSO

Or search - <https://www.nipso.org.uk/service-providers/complaints-standards>



The screenshot shows the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman website. The header includes a phone number (0800 34 34 24), navigation links (Contact Us, Jobs, Latest, FAQs), a search bar, and a language selector (English). The main navigation menu includes links to 'About Us', 'Make a complaint', 'For Service Providers', 'Our Investigations', and 'Other Resources'. The breadcrumb trail reads: Home / For Service Providers / Complaints standards for Northern Ireland. The main heading is 'Complaints standards for Northern Ireland', followed by a subheading: 'Information on our work to create a common set of complaints handling standards for all public bodies.' An illustration depicts a person standing on a stack of boxes, reaching up to place a document on a shelf, with a question mark icon nearby.

What are complaints standards?

Complaints standards are a set of procedures which explain to public bodies how they should deal with complaints. They are contained in our Model Complaints Handling Procedures, which have been created to help all public bodies handle complaints in broadly the same way.

We want complaints to be resolved quickly. Straightforward ones should be dealt with within **5 days**, while more complicated ones should usually take no more than **20 days**.

We're also aiming to transform the culture in public bodies so that complaints are seen as a tool to help improve services.

We're doing this by giving organisations support, advice, and training.

[Our Consultation](#)

[Model Complaints Handling Procedures](#)

Resources



Local Government Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) (442.75 KB, pdf)



Statement of Principles (716.74 KB, pdf)

