



# **Northern Ireland Social Care Council**

## **Complaints and Feedback Annual Report**

**2023/24**

## Introduction

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) always aims to deliver high quality services in all aspects of its business and works to identify how improvements can be made on an on-going basis.

The Social Care Council also recognises that sometimes things can go wrong and when this happens it is in everyone's best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage. To support this the Social Care Council has a Complaints Policy ([click here to access](#)) – which explains how complaints about the Social Care Council's processes, systems or staff can be raised.

If a complaint or concern is about a social worker, social care worker or a student studying for a degree in social work – this is managed through a different system and by our 'Fitness to Practise' (FtP) team. Our website explains how to raise these types of concerns ([click here to access](#)).

It is important that the Social Care Council learns from its experiences and mistakes and uses the feedback it receives in a positive way to improve its services for everyone.

This report looks at the complaints or feedback we received from April 2023 to March 2024, the outcome of those complaints, what we learnt as a result of investigating them, and what else we did to improve our services and the way in which we support members of the public and registrants to raise any concerns.

## Who we are

The Social Care Council is responsible for the registration and regulation of the Social Care Workforce which comprises around 48,000 people who work in a range of social care services (social work, social care, and also people studying for a degree in social work). The organisation was established in 2001, under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2001 and is an Arms' Length Body, sponsored by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. The Social Care Council delivers its programme of work across four strategic themes which are –

- Delivering effective regulation;
- Developing the capability of the workforce;

- Leading with influence; and
- Innovating and improving.

## **Our Vision and Values**

Its vision is ‘to improve standards in social work and social care’. The Social Care Council’s values underpin its culture and explain how they work with others. The Social Care Council’s values are

- promote respect
- work with integrity
- believe in partnership
- strive for excellence.

## **Our Complaints Policy**

The Social Care Council’s Complaints Policy was last reviewed in December 2023. A number of changes were made to the policy to improve the way complaints and feedback are recorded, how they are managed (to improve how long it takes to respond), and to improve how the organisation learns from complaints.

In addition, all staff were trained on the new policy, and it forms part of the induction for all new staff.

The Complaints Policy aims to

- resolve problems at the earliest opportunity;
- assist the Social Care Council in improving its services by learning from the feedback, experiences and concerns of its registrants and the public;
- protect the rights and confidentiality of those who raise concerns;
- ensure that senior management are informed of issues being raised so that services can be improved;
- provide consistent equal treatment of all persons who raise concerns.

When a complaint or feedback is received, it is registered by staff and immediately sent to the team who are best placed to respond to it. It is

also acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt. The complaint or feedback is then overseen by the senior manager in that function – and the person will receive a reply to their complaint within 20 working days. Often a full response is sent much sooner than this.

If the complaint or feedback is complex and/or requires a lot of time to investigate fully, the senior manager can escalate it to the Head of Corporate Services.

If the person is not satisfied with the response they receive, they can also raise it with the Head of Corporate Services.

If the Social Care Council cannot resolve the issue to the individual's satisfaction, they can raise their concern with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Their contact details can be found at **Annex A** at the back of this report.

The Social Care Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) reviews reports on complaints and feedback every 3 months. Reports on complaints and feedback also form part of the reporting to the organisation's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and its Board. Finally, the organisation produces an annual report on the complaints and feedback it received during the year – and includes an overview of this in its Annual Report and Accounts.

This flow of information is designed to support the Senior Leadership Team and the Board in *making decisions* about the services the organisation delivers. It is also one of the ways the Senior Leadership Team and Board receives *assurance* on how well the organisation and its staff are delivering its services.

## **Complaints and Feedback during 2023/24**

During the year 2023/24 (April 2023 to March 2024), the Social Care Council received 10 complaints. A breakdown of the complaints is set out in Table A below.

Of these complaints – all were acknowledged within 2 working days and responded to within 20 working days in line with the Complaints Policy.

Seven of the complaints were from social care workers, one was from a social worker and one was from an employer.

All of the complaints received were either directed to the Registration Team or Fitness to Practise Team to consider in the first instance in line with the Complaints Policy.

Eight out of the ten complaints were upheld following investigation.

Two individuals escalated their complaint to the second stage of the Complaints Policy for further review/investigation. In both of these circumstances the complaints were not upheld.

**Table A**

2023/24						
Complainant	Nature of Complaint	Outcome	Acknowledge time	Response Time	Lessons learnt	
Social care worker	Getting registered – first time	Resolved	1 day	1 day	None identified	
Social care worker	Getting registered – first time	Resolved	1 day	1 day	None identified	
Social care worker	Waiting times to get through and system issues	Resolved	1 day	1 day	System issues referred to Database team.	
Social worker	FtP process and staff	Escalated/ Not upheld **	2 days	20 days	None identified	
Social care worker	Time to receive certificate	Resolved	1day	1 day	Review of all outstanding certificates carried out	
Social care worker	FtP and registration issues	Escalated/ Not upheld **	1 day	20 days	None identified	
Social care worker	Re-registration system issues	Resolved	2 days	7 days	None identified	
Social care worker	FtP publication matters	Resolved	1 day	20 days	None identified	
Employer	Ability to contact NISCC through the phone	Resolved	1 day	8 days	Pilot to use call centre services to support call handling	
Social care worker	Level of registration fee	Resolved	2 days	2 days	None identified	

\*\* - These complaints were escalated to the second stage of the policy and on further investigation were closed and not upheld, as per the original recommendation.

**To note:**

*Days refer to working days* – complaints must be acknowledged within 2 working days. Complaints must be responded to in full within 20 working days.

### Complaints may be:

*Resolved* – complaint upheld

*Not upheld* – complaint has not been upheld

*Escalated/resolved* – individual remains unsatisfied and the complaint has escalated to the next level of review as set out in the Complaints Policy. Complaint upheld on appeal to second level.

*Escalated/not upheld* - individual remains unsatisfied and the complaint has escalated to the next level of review as set out in the Complaints Policy. Complaint not upheld on appeal to second level. The individual may appeal to the NIPSO at this stage.

### **Findings and Learning as a result of the Complaints**

Three of the ten complaints were in relation to complex issues regarding ongoing (and closed) Fitness to Practise proceedings. There were no issues identified in terms of the process or regulation model as a result of these complaints.

Three of the complaints were about the ability to contact NISCC either through the phone or were in relation to the timely response to emailed queries. Issues regarding the level of emails were addressed during the 2023/24 business year with additional resources being allocated to the team. During 2024, a pilot scheme was developed to test the impact of using a call handling service to better support the number of individuals who prefer to contact the Social Care Council by phone.

Three of the complaints were system related issues. These were referred to the organisation's Database Team to consider as part of their development work.

One complaint was about the level of registration fee – there were no issues or learning identified.

### **What else?**

Of the ten complaints received:

- None were escalated to the NIPSO
- 7 were from male registrants and 2 were female (one was from an employer rather than individual)
- The new process for early and local resolution has meant that most of the complaints were responded to quickly and resolved/closed.

## **Complaints Management – 2024/25**

Following a review of how complaints and feedback are recorded and managed, the Social Care Council has seen an increase in complaints (in the year 2022/23 – there were two complaints registered).

The new Complaints Policy has been rolled out to all staff, and arrangements to report on complaints and feedback are in place – together with learning lessons and improving our services as a result of the feedback.

A further review of the Policy will be taken forward during 2024/25 to take on board learning from the new Policy, improvements in the way complaints are escalated and recorded, and the Complaints Standards for Health and Social Care being developed by the NIPSO.

The Social Care Council is also broadening the data it records in relation to complaints – including Section 75 data, workforce data, trends based on previous years, and triangulating this information to build a broader picture on the impact of services delivered by the organisation. This will include evaluating the effectiveness of its Complaints Policy to ensure it is fit for purpose.

[February 2025]

## **Annex A**

### **Contacts**

Complaints Manager

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#### **Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

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