

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Please contact us if you would like this information in an alternative format such as large print, audio, Braille, disk, in an alternative language or if an interpreter is required.

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland works hard to provide the best possible service, but things can sometimes go wrong.

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the customer services provided by us, we want to hear from you straight away. We welcome this as an important aid to improving what we do and may help us to deal with something we would otherwise overlook.

You can be expected to be treated with respect and fairness at all times. We expect that you will also treat our staff dealing with your complaint with the same courtesy, respect and fairness.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not.

This Complaints Procedure is designed to address any specific concerns individuals have that relate to the quality of customer service provided by Commission staff.

This procedure covers complaints about:

- the standard of service provided by the Equality Commission and
- the behaviour of the Equality Commission or staff.

This could include:-

- delays in reviewing information and providing responses within acceptable or reasonable time frames;
- difficulty in contacting the correct staff member;
- the attitude displayed and conduct of Commission staff;
- the lack of appropriate action by Commission staff;
- incorrect information or guidance given by Commission staff.

This Procedure does **not** cover all dissatisfaction with the Commission and its work:-

- dissatisfaction with Commission Policy
- decisions relating to the statutory discretion of the Commission in the use of its powers - for example those relating to applications for legal assistance or relating to the exercise of the Commission's statutory discretion to initiate investigations - these can be challenged legally in other ways;
- matters that have already been fully investigated through the Complaints Procedure;
- anonymous complaints.

Time Limits for Raising Complaints:

To help us resolve your complaint or concern please tell us what it is as soon as possible. The normal time limits we apply for raising complaints are:

- Within 6 months of the incident giving rise to the problem:
or
- within 6 months of your becoming aware that you have a cause for complaint providing it is not more than 12 months after the incident giving rise to the problem.

We will be flexible and extend these limits if there are good reasons why you did not contact us earlier.

Reasonable Adjustments

If you require a reasonable adjustment because you are a disabled person and unable to contact us in writing please, contact us yourself or have somebody contact us on your behalf to discuss your adjustment needs.

Data Protection

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Any personal information given by you will be used only for the purposes of your complaint, subject to the need to disclose information as required for lawful purposes and/or as a result of and statutory, legal or parliamentary obligations placed on the Commission.

We publish information in our Annual Report on the numbers and categories of complaints we receive.

Principles and Standards

When dealing with a complaint, the Commission will ensure that it follows the principles that have been developed by the to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman "[Principles of Good Complaint Handling](#)".

How to Complain

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

In the first instance, you should try to resolve your complaint with the relevant officer, as s/he will probably be in the best position to help you quickly and resolve your complaint.

If s/he is not available or you would prefer to approach somebody else then please ask for his or her Manager.

If you need the assistance in obtaining the name of the Manager, please speak to the Commission's Complaints Coordinator. Contact details are provided at the end of this procedure.

If it is not possible to resolve the problem promptly, we will take a record of your complaint and arrange the best way and time for getting back to you – normally within **five** working days.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

If you have been unable to resolve your complaint informally or if you wish to go straight to a formal complaint you should put your complaint in writing to the Commission's **Complaints Coordinator** setting out the details, explaining what you think went wrong and what you feel would put things right.

You can do this either by letter, email or by using the complaints form at the end of this procedure.

Help Us Deal with your Complaint

You may know the name of the person in the Equality Commission you wish to contact. If not:

- be as clear as possible about the nature of your complaint or concern so that you may be put in touch with the best person to respond to you;
- tell us why you are unhappy and what you think we should be doing;
- try to be specific, giving details of dates, names and subjects, where this is appropriate.
- please let us have any documentation, by post or email, as soon as possible.

We would hope too, that you will be courteous and fair in your dealings with Equality Commission at all times.

When the Complaints Coordinator receives a written complaint, he will arrange for it to be fully investigated, normally by a member of staff who is senior to the person complained about and who has not been involved in the events giving rise to your complaint.

Should the complaint be against the Chief Executive, it will be referred to the Chief Commissioner for investigation.

Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing within **five** working days of receiving it and you will be informed of when you can expect a full response.

This should normally be within **three weeks** but when the investigation is expected to exceed that we will let you know within that period what action has been taken and tell you when we expect to provide you with a full response.

Stage 3 - Review

If you are still unhappy with the situation you can ask for your complaint to be referred to the Director of the area involved and if s/he has already been involved, the matter will be referred to a more senior officer, who will arrange for a further review of your complaint to be carried out.

You will be informed within **five** working days that your complaint has been received and you will be told when to expect a full response.

The review should normally be completed within **three weeks** of your review request.

Stage 4 – Public Services Ombudsman

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint after you have received a response to stage 3 you have the right to contact the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO).

At the conclusion of the final stage of the Commission's complaints process, written notification will be sent to you, within **two weeks**, advising you that:

- the Commission's complaints handling procedure has been exhausted;
- that, if dissatisfied, you can refer the complaint to NIPSO;
- informing you of the time limit for doing so; and
- providing the contact details of NIPSO.

The Ombudsman will normally only deal with your complaint after you have gone through our complaints handling system and normally will only investigate your complaint if referred to it within six months of completing the Commission's complaints handling procedure.

We will co-operate fully with NIPSO throughout any investigation.

Putting things right

When we get things wrong, we will act to:

- accept responsibility and apologise
- explain what went wrong and why, and try to put things right
- learn lessons from mistakes and change policies and practices where proportionate and sensible to do so.

Contact Details:

Complaints Coordinator

Frank McWilliams,
Complaints Coordinator
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
7-9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP

Telephone: 028 90 500600

Email: fmcwilliams@equalityni.org

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 - 37 Wellington Place
Belfast BT1 6HN

Telephone: 028 90 233821

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Website: nipso.org.uk

Alternative Formats

Please contact if you would like this information on alternative format such as large print, audio, braille, disc in alternative language or if an interpreter is required.

August 2020

Complaints Form

Name:

Address:

Telephone(s)

Email address:

Details of Complaint:

Name of Officer complained of, if applicable/available:

What would you like us to do to make things right?

List of enclosures (please do not send originals)

Signed:

Date:

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Please send the completed form to:

Complaints Coordinator
Frank McWilliams,
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland,
Equality House,
7-9 Shaftesbury Square,
Belfast,
BT2 7DP.

Telephone: 028 90 500600
Website: www.equalityni.org
Email: fmcwilliams@equalityni.org

August 2020