



BUSINESS PLAN 2015-16

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Glossary of Terms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AOCC	Assembly Ombudsman/ Commissioner for Complaints
ASSIST	Advice, Support Service and Initial Screening Team
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
EIR	Environmental Information Regulations
DPA	Data protection Act
FOI	Freedom of Information
HSC	Health and Social Care
IC	Implementation Committee (chaired by Deputy Ombudsman)
ICO	Information Commissioners Office
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LGES	Local Government Ethical Standards
NIHRC	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
NIJAO	Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman
NIPSO	Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
OMT	Operational Management Team
PRONI	Public Record Office in Northern Ireland
SMT	Senior Management Team
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)
VES	Voluntary Exit Scheme

1. Introduction

This Business Plan describes what the Ombudsman's Office aims to achieve during 2015-16. It is set firmly within the context of a new corporate plan that has recently been agreed for the period 2015-18. The corporate plan has been developed primarily to take account of an expanded jurisdiction and new authorities contained in pending reform legislation. This new legislation was introduced into the Assembly in April 2015 and, subject to the legislative process, it is expected to receive Royal Assent by autumn 2015. The new legislation will bring significant extensions in jurisdiction and new powers and herald the creation of a replacement body – The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

This business plan therefore focuses on the transitional work necessary in 2015-16 to prepare us for the organisational changes resulting from the new legislation. However it continues also to retain focus on the delivery of the core “business as usual” of the Office to the standards of depth and quality that are the hallmark of this Office.

Under current draft proposals, the Assembly is also legislating (as part of the NIPSO Bill) for the functions of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman (NIJAO) to be transferred to the proposed NIPSO. In effect, the person holding the office of NIPSO will also hold the office of NIJAO. Discussions have already been concluded during 2014-15 with Department of Justice officials to establish appropriate funding for the undertaking of this new function.

Further to the above, in June 2014, under the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, the Ombudsman, in his role as Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, was given a significant new area of responsibility in respect of ethical standards in local government. This Office undertakes the following functions:

- (i) investigation of complaints of alleged breaches of the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors (the Code), and;
- (ii) adjudication and, where there has been a breach of the Code, application of appropriate sanction.

Led by the Deputy Ombudsman, the Local Government Ethical Standards (LGES) Directorate, as well as being responsible for investigations and managing a developing case load, also has a key role in policy development. The adjudication function can only be fulfilled by the Commissioner. Significant development work and outreach activity

has been undertaken and is ongoing in respect of this high profile new statutory function.

Internally, during 2015-16 my Office plans to build further upon the successful restructuring of our investigative resources, combining the work of ASSIST (Advice, Support Service and Initial Screening Team), with the investigative teams in a way that maximises the throughput, quality, efficiency and effectiveness of our service to the public. An important focus for the 3-year Corporate Plan period will be the development of a consistent and systematic follow-up on compliance with recommendations.

Hence this year's plan is set against the background of a number of significant external and internal changes. The plan firstly summarises our 2015-16 priorities and then sets out the key activities and measures in pursuit of those priorities. These include:

- the establishment of NIPSO;
- a review of our investigative processes and procedures which takes account of our new structure and the body of precedent and policy that has built up over the last number of years;
- the conduct of a scoping exercise on compliance reporting on Ombudsman's recommendations in advance of the proposed introduction of Own Initiative investigations
- further planned developments regarding ASSIST;
- a review of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in respect of our core complaints investigation work;
- the continued development and refinement of the LGES jurisdiction including service delivery plans, communications plans and KPIs;
- the delivery, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) , of an International Human Rights Conference, early in 2016.
- Corporate Services – HR, Finance, Infrastructure and Organisation plans that will better inform and support the evolving structure and functions of my Office and facilitate the creation of the new Office of the NIPSO.

Finally, the plan acknowledges the factors that will enable continued success – our staff and our budget.

2. Our Purpose and Values

Who we are:

The Office of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman, which is completely independent, was established in 1969 by an Act of Parliament. The Ombudsman and his Deputy are assisted by a team of investigators and support staff.

What we do:

We investigate complaints made by people who believe that public bodies in Northern Ireland have not acted properly or fairly towards them. If we find maladministration we can make recommendations to address it through suggested remedy and redress. We also use the evidence obtained, and the conclusions reached, to contribute to improvements in public services.

You can expect us to:

- be thorough and efficient
- be fair and impartial
- consider complaints independently and in confidence
- behave professionally and with integrity
- communicate clearly and effectively
- treat people with respect and with regard for their human rights.

3. Strategic Objectives

In February 2015 the Ombudsman and Senior management Team (SMT) undertook a review of the current strategic position of the Office and the projected impact both internally and externally of the emerging NIPSO legislative proposals. As a result of this review we have re-stated our overall vision as:

Making a difference through Fairness, Justice, and Nurturing our Expertise.

The components of this vision have been expanded to form a number of key corporate priorities, as follows:

Making a difference

We will strive to enhance the experience of citizens by improving the standard of our public services.

We will seek to collaborate with public bodies where appropriate (and where it does not compromise our independence) in order to improve their administrative and complaints handling practices and promote a culture of continuous learning.

We will build strong partnerships and share good administrative and ethical practice with sister bodies and with bodies in jurisdiction where that's appropriate.

Fairness

We will treat complainants, councillors and staff of bodies in jurisdiction fairly and with respect.

We will respect diversity and human rights.

We will work in an open and transparent way.

Justice

We will investigate impartially allegations of maladministration and poor conduct.

We will protect the privacy of the complainant and those complained of.

We will report openly on our findings in order to meet the public interest.

We will seek to achieve appropriate citizen redress through the most proportionate and appropriate means, including the consideration of all available models of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

Nurturing and Building our Expertise

We will recruit and retain people with appropriate skills, competencies and expertise.

We will value and believe in our people.

We will constantly develop, improve and motivate our people through appropriate training and organisational development initiatives.

We will initiate and maintain links and collaborate where appropriate with other public sector ombudsman offices and oversight bodies.

4. Summary of 2015-16 Priorities

The key Office priorities for 2015-16 are to:

- Successfully prepare the ground for the introduction of NIPSO, through the five established implementation work streams, overseen by the Implementation Committee.
- working with the Assembly Commission OFMDFM and other stakeholders, deliver a stakeholder engagement and communication strategy focusing on the new areas of jurisdiction;
- deliver an efficient and effective investigation service, driven by relevant, stretching targets that are monitored regularly;
- incorporate fully into our investigative process the Human Rights approach that has been developed by the Office, jointly with the NI Human Rights Commission.
- embed the LGES investigative and adjudication processes;
- delivering, in conjunction with the NIHRC, an International Human Rights Conference, early in 2016
- Ensure that expenditure is managed so that Office expenditure is contained within the approved budget for the financial year 2015-16 and that our financial targets are achieved;
- Deliver operational efficiency, effectiveness and accountability through clearly defined priorities, performance measures and an alignment of resources that will address business needs, while also supporting the development of new areas of business;
- Share strategic learning insights into any systemic weaknesses that are identified through our investigation of complaints and service providers that reflect our commitment to continuous improvement in the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland;
- Focus our investigative resources on achieving and monitoring compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations
- Continue to improve our service to the public by further developing our information and communication systems.

5. a) Achievement of our Priorities - ASSIST

As recorded in successive Annual Reports and summarised in Table 1 below, the last number of years has seen a significant upward trend in the number of complaints received. This has been due mainly to the increases in health cases emerging from the change in 2009 when the Health and Social Care (HSC) complaints procedure was reduced from a two stage procedure to a single stage procedure.

Table 1 – Six Year Trend in Maladministration Complaints

Year	No of Maladministration Complaints	Year on Year % Change	Cumulative % Change
2009/10	681	-	-
2010/11	695	2%	2%
2011/12	640	-8%	-6%
2012/13	742	16%	9%
2013/14	972	31%	43%
2014/15	830	-15%	22%

This overall growth in complaint numbers has given rise to significant operational challenges and resulted in the build up of a backlog of complaints and investigations. In response, in May 2013, the Ombudsman's office was reorganised and restructured to provide for a front of office Advice, Support Service and Initial Screening Team (ASSIST) and two generalist investigation teams. ASSIST has established itself as a highly effective gateway for complaints. It is the first point of contact for all members of the public who have concerns about their experience of the administration of public services. The team provides a service for all who make contact, either by resolving matters at the front of the office, or by referring the case on to the dedicated investigative teams for further investigation where this is warranted.

In October 2014 the Director of Investigations in ASSIST introduced a more rigorous approach to the application of the Office's Investigation and Validation Criteria Policy. In addition the OMT reviewed and revised our complaints handling process. A weekly performance management report also now provides management with comprehensive information on the status of all existing cases.

The above initiatives have helped reduce the number of cases passing through to the investigation teams, affording them greater opportunity to focus on the completion of the

more intractable and complex cases. In the financial year 2014-15 numbers stabilised due also in part to a reduction in the number of complaints made under the Assembly Ombudsman legislation against Executive Departments.

During 2015-16 it is planned to:

- a. Continue with the ASSIST model and refine KPIs to reflect current processes and demand trends: - Initial assessment; substantive assessment and investigation. We continue to focus on our casework and the corresponding KPIs whilst ensuring we maintain the appropriate level of quality. The revised set of Office KPIs for 2015-16, including those relevant to ASSIST, is set out at **Annex A**.
- b. From June 2015 fully incorporate a human rights based approach into our assessment process. This will further enhance the work undertaken in 2014-2015 to streamline our process and procedures on foot of the previous office restructuring in 2013.
- c. Focus on identifying the changes required to our procedures upon the implementation of NIPSO; planning and preparing for those changes so that the citizens using our service are affected as little as possible by the transition.

5. b) Achievement of our Priorities - Complaints Investigation

The core function of my Office remains the efficient and effective handling of public concerns about maladministration in the provision of public services. This is often complex, sensitive and wide ranging work - investigating individual complaints about Northern Ireland Departments, and their statutory agencies, as well as a wide range of other bodies delivering public services including housing, local government, health and social care trusts and independent health service providers. For 2015-16 a key objective for the Office is therefore to sustain operational efficiency and effectiveness in the management of casework whilst implementing the structural and functional changes detailed elsewhere in this plan.

As is normal practice each year, The KPIs for Complaints Investigation for the Office, shown at **Annex A** have been reviewed and adjusted where appropriate. This takes account of developments in ASSIST and also aims to ensure that the indicators continue to reflect the current emphasis on the importance of quality in casework generally as well as on achieving a timely conclusion to each individual case. Emphasis will also be placed on the early resolution of complaints where this is appropriate in

order to achieve an effective and proportionate use of resources. It remains our view that achieving early resolution of a complaint has the potential to help rebuild the trust between a complainant and the body subject to the complaint.

Discussions around the relevant KPIs have centred on the need to ensure they remain both realistic and challenging – reflecting the increasing case volumes and complexity whilst being capable of informing the objectives set for staff as part of their annual appraisal process.

Progress on the management of all aspects of the Office's casework will continue to be monitored through weekly casework meetings and reported on at Operational and Senior Management Team meetings, as well as being detailed in regular progress reports to the Audit Committee. This is greatly facilitated by the weekly performance management reports mentioned under 5 a) above.

In terms of further developments for 2015-16, we intend to commence preparing the ground for the undertaking of Own Initiative Investigations, which under current legislative proposals would begin from April 2018. Arising from this is the need to consider the development of mechanisms for follow up and compliance reporting. Follow up reports on own initiative/systemic investigation are normal where these powers are exercised by Ombudsmen. Such follow up work can be resource intensive, particularly if it is found that compliance has been poor. In light of this it is planned during 2015-16 to carry out a scoping exercise on compliance reporting. The objective is to ensure that such follow-up activity would in due course be explicitly reflected in the Own Initiative workload of the office as an activity in its own right, warranting specific resource and planning.

5. c) Achievement of our Priorities - Local Government Ethical Standards (LGES)

Since June 2014, in his role as Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Ombudsman has been responsible for investigating and adjudicating on written complaints that councillors have breached the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors (the Code). 14 complaints of alleged breaches of the Code were received in 2014-15, prior to the 11 new Councils moving out of shadow form into live operation and assuming the extended range of powers as set out in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

In addition, under the 2014 Act the Commissioner may produce guidance on matters relating to the conduct of Councillors. Accordingly, in March 2015 the Commissioner published extensive guidance on the Code.

During 2015-16 the LGES directorate will investigate and manage a developing case load. It will work to the following KPIs:

1: To notify the complainant and the complained-against Councillor(s) within **4 weeks** of receipt of a valid complaint of the decision whether to investigate.

2: To complete an investigation within **48 weeks** of the date of the decision informing the complainant and the complained-against Councillor(s) that the complaint would be investigated.

These have been incorporated in **Annex A**, along with the other Office KPIs. As the LGES regime beds in it is intended that the performance against these indicators (and indeed the appropriateness of the KPIs themselves) will be kept under review.

In addition, during this business plan year the LGES Directorate will:

- Build on the current guidance on the Code by providing local examples to support this guidance, as the body of decisions develops in Northern Ireland.
- Arising from feedback received from the extensive outreach activity undertaken during 2014-15, develop and agree a Memorandum of Understanding between the Office and the Local Government Auditor, and consider the need for similar such memoranda with other relevant bodies.
- Continue engagement with DoE on matters relating to ethical standards: providing detailed responses to any further consultations on the Code of Conduct and on the continuing funding for the function.
- Introduce a Public Interest Test – we will draw up guidance on the public interest factors which will be taken into consideration in the assessment of complaints and to make this guidance publicly available.
- On foot of a Northern Ireland Assembly review of its Code of Conduct, participate fully in any subsequent DOE review of the Code.
- Regarding “Action instead of or in addition to an investigation” - we will input fully to consideration of any options proposed by DOE for handling minor complaints through action instead of or in addition to an investigation.

- Maintain the current communications and engagement strategy and revise guidance as necessary, to help ensure that all those involved and affected by the Code understand what it requires of them, individually and collectively.

5 d) Achievement of our Priorities - Establishment of NIPSO

In September 2013 the Chair of the OFMDFM Committee introduced detailed policy proposals for the reform of the current Ombudsman's legislation. The NIPSO Bill was introduced in April 2015. Subject to its passage through the Assembly the new legislation will significantly extend the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. It will merge the current offices of Assembly Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints into a new office to be known as the NI Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). The proposed legislation will also enhance NIPSO's relationship with the Assembly as well as the current powers and remit of the office. The proposals include an extension of the range of bodies to be subject to the Ombudsman's investigation (e.g. Schools, FE colleges and Universities), as well as a provision for the Office to instigate "own initiative" investigations. The legislative process will be completed within this business plan year.

An Implementation Committee (IC) has been formed to oversee the transition from the current AOCC office to the new NIPSO. That group is to meet monthly during 2015-16 and beyond this period as necessary, in order to oversee the task of implementing the changes brought about by the new legislation. The IC comprises the Deputy Ombudsman as chair and each of the five Directors as well as the Human Resources Manager. To implement the necessary changes a number of work streams have been identified as key elements of NIPSO implementation and programmes allocated to members of the IC as follows:

- Communications
- Website Design and Development
- Operational Processes and Procedures
- Organisational Development and Human Resources
- Governance and Accountability

The Chair of the IC is accountable to the Ombudsman for delivering the change programme successfully and during 2015-16 will report on progress at OMT, SMT and Audit Committee. In addition the Chair is a member of the Assembly NIPSO Bill team and the Assembly Implementation team and will report also on progress to the Assembly's Implementation team.

Success in all of the above strands of the change programme is clearly key to the success of the overall transition from AOCC to NIPSO. In particular there is a need to ensure that we have effective and timely communications to keep all of our external and internal stakeholders informed along the way. Hence a 3 year Communications Strategy, has been developed and is available separately on our website. This contains further detail of the planned communication activities to be undertaken during 2015-16.

Also of particular significance, in anticipation of the introduction of the NIPSO the Office is reviewing its current approach to governance and accountability to ensure that we put in place a system that builds upon existing arrangements and provides appropriate assurances. This is particularly important given the additional responsibilities and accountability arrangements associated with the assumption of responsibility for LGES and NIJAO alongside the significant extensions to the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman.

5 e) Achievement of our Priorities – HR and Corporate Services

Within Corporate Services and related functions, during 2015-16 we will progress the following areas:

NIPSO HR Project

We will engage with key stakeholders, develop eligibility criteria and agree a timeframe for staff transfer decisions. We plan to engage regularly with staff, the relevant trade unions and employers to inform them of the changes facing the Office. Although this will not be a transfer under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE), we will nevertheless adhere to the principles that underpin TUPE. We intend to engage regularly with trade unions regarding the transfer of staff to the direct NIPSO employment.

Associated with the proposed new Office of the NIPSO, we will for the first time become a substantive employer in our own right. To support this we will continue to develop an entire suite of HR policies and procedures. This is central to successfully meeting our responsibilities as an organisation employing our own staff. We will also ensure that appropriate pensions arrangements are in place for NIPSO employees.

Review of Corporate Services

With the pending introduction of NIPSO an overall review of office staffing and structure is being undertaken. The overall exercise will not only focus on the front of office and investigation teams but will also have implications for the range of essential corporate support functions. In relation to Corporate Services the planned absence on maternity

leave of a key member of staff and the staffing risks associated with the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) together mean that a paper providing options to be considered for the future staffing and structure of Corporate Services is to be drafted for agreement by SMT in the first quarter of 2015-16. By necessity this is in advance of the outcome of the wider Office structural review - but we will be careful to ensure that it is complementary.

Performance Management/Case Handling System

We will ensure that the further reporting and management information capability within our Case Handling System, enhanced during 2014-15, is fully exploited and that the information is utilised appropriately to measure performance against our 2015-16 indicators, identifying areas where further opportunities may exist for both individual and collective performance improvement.

Joint Working

A key element of our stakeholder engagement strategy will continue to be to work with other oversight or regulatory bodies to achieve improvements in public administration. From 2009 the Office has been using Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's "Principles of Good Administration" to inform our assessment of maladministration and to set an objective benchmark against which I can measure the actions of bodies in my jurisdiction. As a result of a project commenced in 2013 with the Public Record Office in Northern Ireland (PRONI) that has focused on good records management, in conjunction with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) the Office launched in July 2014 a Guide to Good Administration and Good Records Management. During 2015-16 the Office will continue to focus on developing all opportunities for effective joint working with the ICO with a focus on good records management in local government, given their new responsibilities.

Human Rights

As a result of a Service Level Agreement with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) we have developed a human rights based approach to our investigations. The objective is to ensure that we comply with our human rights obligations, apply best practice and test whether bodies meet the FREDA values of Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity and Autonomy in the carrying out of their functions. The project concluded early in 2014-15 and has resulted in the production of a Human Rights Manual specifically for AOCC staff. In addition advice is being developed in relation to human rights issues that are emerging from the new LGES jurisdiction.

In February 2015 the Deputy Ombudsman and the Director of the NIHRC presented the manual to the International Ombudsman's Institute and staff of the Austrian ombudsman's office in Vienna. This was very well received and has added to the considerable interest in the project, with invitations also received to provide human rights awareness training in Gibraltar, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

In March 2015 the manual was also discussed and disseminated at an International Human Rights convention at the UN Offices in Geneva. Work is ongoing to develop a proposal for an International Human Rights Conference early in 2016 to showcase the project, manual and joint working initiative.

Other Corporate Services

We will retain our focus on:

- Ongoing management of services and facilities, including organising and managing, procurement and tendering processes related to securing best value across all areas including stationery provision, premises, and technology, transport and accommodation issues within Office.
- Ensuring that key performance targets are reviewed at each SMT meeting.
- Ongoing management of Ombudsman communications – preparation and publication in July 2015 of the Annual Report for 2014-15 and the ongoing maintenance of the Publication Scheme.
- Ensuring that any emerging ICT requirements (telephony, computers etc.) are addressed to support the work of the office.
- Ongoing statutory obligations in relation to monthly review of the risk register, governance, health and safety, responses to requests for information under FOI/DPA/EIR legislation, complete annual register of interests exercise, ongoing information management, contract management and business continuity.

Other Human Resources

We will continue to:

- Ensure that the office has sufficient and effectively trained staff to meet its current and future business needs.
- Administer the recruitment process (Interchange, secondments, elective transfers etc.) to ensure that appropriate staffing levels are maintained within the Office throughout 2015-16.
- Ensure management and staff undertake and agree performance appraisals and complete personal development plans within the agreed timescales.
- Review, update and implement the Office's Training Plan for 2015-16 to renew staff awareness and prepare staff for the new legislative requirements.

- Continue to develop and implement appropriate HR policies and procedures to prepare for the enactment of the NIPSO legislation.

6. a) Delivery of our Plan – our Staff

The staff of any organisation are central to the successful delivery of its services and are its most critical resource. The Office has a mix of professional and administrative staff drawn from a wide range of backgrounds across the public service in Northern Ireland. We are very fortunate to have a committed and enthusiastic workforce who have, despite the pressures of increased numbers of complaints, performed well within all the existing and emerging constraints.

The business plan year is clearly a period of transition as we prepare for the introduction of the new legislation. In order to ensure staff have the necessary skills to equip them for both “business as usual” and for the changes that lie ahead, a series of in-house workshops have been held early in the year, focusing on health and employment issues, investigations procedure, judicial reviews, effective file and case management and the Principles of Good Administration. These workshops were designed after consultation with staff to ensure the relevant skills and/or knowledge gaps are covered. Once this “Refresh and Refocus” programme is completed, it will be followed up as appropriate during the course of 2015-16, with further areas addressed as the need may arise. This is consistent with our strategic aim of “Nurturing and Building our Expertise” and ensuring that our staff are equipped with all of the skills and expertise necessary to enable them to give of their best, whilst obtaining maximum job satisfaction and fulfilment.

6. b) Delivery of our Plan – our Budget

Any plans that we lay must always have regard to available financial resources. In recent years public finances have come under severe and continuing pressure. For 2015-16 this has manifested itself in a 5% reduction to our baseline budget. This presents a challenge greater than that which we have faced for a number of years. Moreover, it is clear that this order of year-on-year reduction may well be repeated over the period of the next Assembly term.

This makes it all the more important that we argue our case for existing/new resources using a robust and well developed evidence base. We must continue to demonstrate our case for the financial resources that will be essential if we are to maintain and develop the services that we provide to those citizens who believe that the levels of

public service they have experienced have fallen below the standard that they should reasonably expect.

As regards our budget for 2015-16, the following is an extract, adapted from the Main Estimates submitted in May 2015 for approval by DFP and the Executive:

ASSEMBLY OMBUDSMAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND COMMISSIONER FOR COMPLAINTS

Amounts required in the year ending 31 March 2016 for use by the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints on:

Investigating complaints against government departments and public and local government bodies and investigating and adjudicating on local government ethical standards.

Total Net Resource Requirement **2,199,000**

Above is for:

Investigating complaints of injustice suffered through maladministration by government departments, agencies, public, local government and health and social care bodies; investigating and adjudicating on complaints on local government ethical standards against councillors; administration; related services and associated non-cash items.

It is important to note that whilst the above includes provision for Local Government Ethical Standards it does not include cover for additional resource requirements for which there was not specific legislative cover at the date of Estimates submission, or which could not at that time be reliably estimated. As a result, additional cost pressures arising during the year (e.g. Potential legal challenges or costs associated with the establishment of NIPSO) will be the subject of further in year monitoring bids over the course of the year.

7. Conclusion

This Office is now engaged in a period of change and significant transition as it prepares for the new Ombudsman's Bill and embeds the LGES functions whilst continuing to prioritise and maintain our proven track record in conducting rigorous, high quality investigations of all valid maladministration cases that come before us.

In relation to complaints of maladministration, the front-of-office function and the two generic investigation teams that are now fully established provide a solid basis from which to develop to meet the demands of the NIPSO legislation, while continuing to meet the individual complainant's expectations of a timely, efficient and impartial investigation within available resources.

Regarding LGES I am pleased to say that, thanks to a tremendous team effort, this new function has already become well established in the Office. The publication in March 2015 of my guidance on the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors is a significant achievement. In 2015-16 challenges for the team will arise as the new Councils become established and the Code of Conduct extends its reach to include the new or re-organised functions falling to our local Councillors.

I commend this business plan to all staff and my thanks to them for continuing to meet these challenges during this complex, challenging and exciting period for the Office.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Frawley', written in a cursive style.

Dr Tom Frawley CBE

Northern Ireland Ombudsman

4 June 2015

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) for 2015-16

(COMPLAINTS HANDLING)

KPI 1 – measures how quickly we establish whether the complaint **can** be investigated by this Office. We aim to inform the complainant within **2 weeks** or less of their complaint being received. The target is **90%**.

KPI 2 – measures how quickly we complete our assessment of whether a complaint should be investigated by this office or is suitable for settlement. Assessment is a detailed process which involves considering the complaint and the supporting evidence from both the complainant and the body complained of. This represents case-building in the event a case proceeds to investigation. We aim to complete the assessment process and inform the complainant of the decision within **10 weeks** or less of their complaint being received. The target is **70%**.

KPI 3 – measures how quickly we complete the **investigation** of a complaint and issue a draft report to the body involved. We aim to complete this within **50 weeks** or less of the decision being made to investigate. The target is **70%**.

(LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS)

KPI 4 – we will notify the complainant and the complained-against Councillor(s) within 4 weeks of receipt of a valid complaint of the decision whether to investigate. The target is **85%**.

KPI 5 – we will complete an investigation within 48 weeks of the date of the decision informing the complainant and the complained-against Councillor(s) that the complaint would be investigated. The target is **85%**.

(FINANCIAL)

KPI 6 - we will not exceed the total Net Total Resource expenditure for the year authorised by the Northern Ireland Assembly as detailed in the 2015-16 Spring Supplementary Estimate, limiting any underspend to 2%.

KPI 7 – we will not exceed the capital expenditure for the year authorised by the Northern Ireland Assembly as detailed in the 2015–16 Spring Supplementary Estimate, limiting any underspend to less than 2%

KPI 8 – in supporting the work of the Office the total cash utilised within the year will not exceed the Net Cash Requirement limit authorised by the Northern Ireland Assembly as detailed in the 2015-16 Spring Supplementary Estimate

KPI 9 – we will pay 98% of correctly presented supplier invoices within 10 days of receipt.