



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Consultation on Complaints Handling Standards for the Public Sector - Council Response</b>
<b>Date</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> August 2021
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Resources
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Andrew Kyle, Complaints Champion

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	To advise Members of the ongoing engagement with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and other local authorities and to present the draft Council response to the NIPSO Complaints Handling Standards for the Public Sector Consultation.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>note the ongoing engagement with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and other local authorities; and</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approve the draft response to the Standard Complaint Handling Standards consultation, as set out in Appendix 3, based on going engagement with Party Group Leaders, Departments' complaints officers and feedback from CMT.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	Over recent years, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) has undertaken research (2018-19) with all the public sector bodies under its remit. Following this work, NIPSO engaged with all public sector bodies (2020-21), including Belfast City Council and other councils, to identify complaint management improvement opportunities, in partnership with each sector, with the intention of introducing a public sector model complaints handling procedure.
3.2	Under Part 3 of the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act), NIPSO have been given the authority by the Northern Ireland Assembly to produce a set of principles and procedures to help standardise complaints handling by public bodies in Northern Ireland.
3.3	As planned, NIPSO's Complaints Handling Standards Public Consultation was launched in June and is open to public bodies, advocacy and support groups, politicians, members of the public and anyone with an interest in improving complaints handling and public services in Northern Ireland.
3.4	Alongside the complaints handling consultation, NIPSO has also launched its Research Report on 'Complaints handling in the public sector in Northern Ireland'. The research addresses the complaints handling procedures of public bodies in Northern Ireland, including: the experience of complaining to a public sector body in Northern Ireland; barriers to improved complaints handling; and improvements that might be made to complaints handling in the future.
3.5	<p>In early July, the Deputy Chief Executive (DCEO) requested all Party Group Leaders, to consider completing the consultation questionnaire in order to prepare a formal response by council. As outlined in that request the questionnaire is based on two key documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A draft Statement of Principles (SOP), attached as Appendix 1.</li> <li>• A draft Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP), attached as Appendix 2.</li> </ul>

3.6	NIPSO is also asking the public and stakeholders to comment on the suggested approach it plans to take when implementing future complaint handling changes in the public sector in Northern Ireland.
3.7	The Council's draft response, prepared for approval by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, is attached at Appendix 3. It also takes note of previous feedback from chief officers and senior managers since the start of the Ombudsman's research and engagement, as well as ongoing discussions with departmental complaints officers in preparation for both the consultation and subsequent co-design, all of which will be taken into account during that phase.
3.8	The consultation was due to close on 2 <sup>nd</sup> September but has now been extended to 30 <sup>th</sup> September. Once the consultation has finished, the NIPSO will collate the responses and consider any changes it might need to make and go back to the NI Assembly to seek final approval for its plans.
	<b>Financial and Resource Implications</b>
3.8	None
	<b>Equality or Good Relations Implications</b>
3.9	None
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Appendix 1: Draft Statement of Principles (SOP)</p> <p>Appendix 2: Draft Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP)</p> <p>Appendix 3: NIPSO Consultation - draft Council response.</p>