

Complaints Handling Policy

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Introduction

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) is committed to providing the best possible service to the people with whom we have contact with and acknowledges the need to address any dissatisfaction that a client or any other stakeholder may have with any aspect of that service.

COPNI's core values encourage that we work, both externally and internally, with integrity, openness, honesty and accountability and with respect for inclusiveness, diversity and equality of opportunity. We aim to provide consistently high levels of service to all users and believe in treating every client as an individual.

This Complaints Handling Policy has been drafted and updated in line with the following principles, to ensure that the COPNI complaints handling process is:

- Accessible and simple;
- Fair and impartial;
- Timely, effective and consistent;
- Accountable; and
- Delivering continuous improvement.

The purpose of this Complaints Handling Policy is to enable you as a client, or stakeholder, to advise us immediately if you are unhappy with the services provided by COPNI and thereby assist us as we improve the quality of the service that we provide. It is our policy to address efficiently and in a timely manner any complaints that we receive regarding services we provide.

When a complaint is lodged, you can expect that in dealing with COPNI;

- You will be treated with respect and courtesy.
- Your complaint or enquiry will be dealt with promptly and efficiently.
- Your complaint will be treated confidentially.
- You will be provided with a response in a manner which is clear, accurate, complete, and relevant.
- You will have full access to the advice and guidance you require.

- COPNI will learn from your feedback or complaint to monitor and enhance the services that we provide in developing our services.

2. Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction which requires a response. If you have a complaint, you should bring it to the attention of the person you have been dealing with, or to that person's manager, who will try to resolve the issue quickly.

However, if you still feel dissatisfied after this attempt to deal with your concern, you can submit a formal complaint – see further information in Section 4 below.

3. Time limits for registering a complaint

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 concerns are:

- Within 6 months of the incident giving rise to the problem; or
- Within 6 months of 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.

4. How to make a complaint

There are a number of ways to make a formal complaint. In all cases, it is recommended that you clearly state that you are making a complaint. You can make a complaint via the following means:

- By telephone: 02890 890892. The details of your complaint will be taken down by a member of staff. They will read the information back to you, to ensure that the details are accurate. The member of staff will let you know when we will contact you again to follow up on your complaint.

- By writing to COPNI's Chief Executive at the address below:

Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland,
Equality House,
7-9 Shaftsbury Square,
Belfast,
BT2 7DP

- By email to COPNI's Chief Executive. Email contact details will be provided upon request.

If your complaint concerns the Chief Executive of COPNI, you should instead refer your correspondence to the Commissioner. Any written correspondence in this instance should be addressed to the Commissioner at the postal address above. Email contact details will be provided upon request.

Should your complaint relate to the Commissioner this will be dealt with, in the first instance, by the Chief Executive who will refer it to an independent arbiter after discussion with the Department for Communities. Any written correspondence in this instance should be addressed to the Chief Executive at the postal address above, or by email.

Should your complaint relate to both the Chief Executive and the Commissioner this will be dealt with, in the first instance, by the Chair of COPNI's Audit and Risk Committee who will refer it to an independent arbiter after discussion with the Department for Communities. Any written correspondence in this instance should be addressed to the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee at the postal address above. COPNI will provide an email contact upon request.

5. Timescales for investigation

COPNI will acknowledge your formal complaint within 5 working days, and the Chief Executive, Commissioner or Chair of the ARAC (whichever is relevant) will appoint an independent Investigation Officer within the organisation (or external where required) to

undertake the review of the complaint. A formal response should be provided within 10 working days of acknowledgement of the complaint. Where the investigation is expected to exceed this period, COPNI will write to you confirming when the review is expected to be completed.

6. Right of Appeal

If you are not satisfied with the Chief Executive's investigation, you can take your complaint to the Commissioner. This is the most senior person within COPNI.

All information relating to your complaint and to the Chief Executive's investigation will be passed to the Commissioner. The Commissioner will let you know within 5 working days that she has received the complaint and will provide a formal response within 10 working days of this acknowledgement. Where the investigation is expected to exceed this period, the Commissioner will write to you confirming when the review is expected to be completed.

Where the initial investigation involved the Chief Executive, the Commissioner will appoint a further independent arbiter to review the initial original decision. The Commissioner will let you know within 5 working days that she has received the appeal of the complaint and will provide a formal response within 10 working days of this acknowledgement. Where the investigation is expected to exceed this period, the Commissioner will write to you confirming when the review is expected to be completed.

Where the initial investigation involved the Commissioner, COPNI will appoint a further independent arbiter to review the initial original decision. The Chair of the ARAC will let you know within 5 working days that she has received the appeal of the complaint and will provide a formal response within 10 working days of this acknowledgement. Where the investigation is expected to exceed this period, the Chair of the ARAC will write to you confirming when the review is expected to be completed.

7. Taking your complaint outside of the organisation

If you are not satisfied with COPNI's response, you can seek advice from outside of the organisation. You can contact the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman. Its contact details are as follows:

Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

Telephone: 0800343424

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk