

# NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

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## COMPLAINTS POLICY



<b>Policy name</b>	<b>NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD COMPLAINTS POLICY</b>
<b>Policy owner</b>	<b>Strategic Planning &amp; Governance Manager</b>
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**Alternative Formats**

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Data Protection Officer  
 Northern Ireland Policing Board  
 James House,  
 Block D,  
 2 – 4 Cromac Avenue,  
 The Gasworks,  
 Belfast,  
 BT7 2JA

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## **1. Message from Chief Executive**

The Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Policing Board) values complaints because we believe dealing with complaints effectively can help us to improve our service to the public. This Complaints Policy, which the Board has approved, is consistent with complaints handling across the Public Sector in Northern Ireland and closely follows NIPSO guidance which identifies seven key elements to comply with best practice. The policy aims to help us to 'get it right first time' resolving complaints as quickly as possible and as close as is possible to the point where our service is delivered. For those complaints that can't be resolved quickly the policy commits the Board to conducting thorough, impartial and fair investigations. By adopting this approach we can identify and address service issues raised by complainants with the objective of ensuring the same mistake does not happen again.

The Board believes that handled well, complaints about our service will give our customers a form of remedy and possible redress when things go wrong and can also assist the Policing Board in fulfilling its commitment to 'continuous improvement'. Complaints about our service can provide a real time insight into a customer's views and experience of our service and can highlight problems we might otherwise miss. The complaints policy commits the Board to providing a report on all the complaints received to the NIPB's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee so that, as a Board, we can ensure we are learning from complaints and addressing any failures identified. The policy also commits the Board to reporting all complaints received and the response to them in the Policing Board's Annual Report thus meeting our commitment to Openness and Transparency.

Sinead Simpson

Chief Executive Officer

## **2. What is a Complaint?**

A complaint is defined as any communication from one or more customers which expresses dissatisfaction with any aspect of the service provided by the Policing Board. Customers can complain about issues such as timeliness of our response, an inadequate standard of service, how their needs are met, how we communicated with them, including their treatment by our staff and attitude of staff, for example, 'incivility'.

## **3. Who Can Make a Complaint?**

Any individual who is not satisfied with any aspect of the service provided by the Policing Board including issues such as those indicated in section 2 above. A complaint can be made directly by an individual or through a third party, for example, a family member or friend. If a third party is making a complaint on behalf of an individual the Policing Board requires the written consent of the individual on whose behalf the complaint is being made. If an individual has any difficulty in writing a complaint the Board will endeavor to provide that individual with support to assist them in submitting the complaint. Please note there are a number of functions also undertaken by the Board that are not covered by this procedure, these functions are detailed at section 15.

## **4. Registering and acknowledging a complaint**

When a concern or complaint is received at either Stage One or Stage Two, the matter will be registered on the Policing Board's Complaints Register. The Strategic Planning & Governance Manager will acknowledge the correspondence within three working days, and

the complainant will be provided with a copy of the Policing Board's Complaints Policy. All complaints will be dealt with confidentially, impartially and with appropriate sensitivity, taking account of both Freedom of Information and Data Protection requirements.

## **5. Examining/ Investigating A Complaint**

It is in the interests of all involved that complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively. The procedure adopted by the Policing Board for handling complaints is a two-stage process. In relation to the Board's commitment to continuous improvement, the Board encourages its staff to regularly review working practices and procedures in order to ensure acceptable standards of service are being provided. It is therefore important that the individual member of staff who was originally involved in providing the service should in the first instance deal with any issues of concern raised by a complainant to meet the Board's commitment to achieving the early resolution of a complaint. The Board is committed to demonstrating, in its complaint handling, the standards detailed at Appendix 1.

### **a. Stage One**

The complaint should be made in writing (by letter or e-mail) to the Strategic Planning & Governance Manager of the Policing Board at:

Strategic Planning & Governance Manager

Northern Ireland Policing Board

James House,

Block D,

2 – 4 Cromac Avenue,

The Gasworks,

Belfast,

BT7 2JA

Email: [information@nipolicingboard.org.uk](mailto:information@nipolicingboard.org.uk)

The Board's Strategic Planning & Governance Manager will be responsible for the oversight of how the complaints are being managed. On receipt of a complaint he/she will allocate it to the most appropriate member of staff to ensure the issues that are detailed in the complaint are identified and resolved as speedily as possible. The member of staff assigned to consider the complaint at this stage will consider what the individual is unhappy about and what might be done to remedy the situation. The Strategic Planning & Governance Manager will retain a database of complaints and these will be shared regularly with the CEO and the Board's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

The only exception to the above process is if the complaint involves the Strategic Planning & Governance Manager in which circumstance the complaint will be passed to the Senior Director of Resources.

b. Stage Two

If an individual is unhappy with the outcome at Stage One of the complaint they may decide to proceed to stage two of the Board's complaints procedure.

If a request is made by the complainant in writing to move to Stage Two of the complaints procedure, the file and papers relating to the complaint will be assigned by the Strategic Planning & Governance Manager to a Senior Board Officer to examine and investigate the

complaint with the objective of resolving it. The Board Officer who considers the complaint under Stage Two can, if he/she considers it appropriate and proportionate interview any individual who contributed to any enquiries or statements that were undertaken or submitted under Stage One of the process. The senior Board officer will make a final decision in relation to the complaint. If the complaint is rejected by the Board the next steps for a complainant are detailed at Section 8.

## **6. Reporting on a Complaint Investigation**

The member of the Board's staff investigating the complaint, at Stage Two, will use the Complaint Investigation Report (see Appendix 2) when reporting on the outcome of their investigation. The decision maker authority will be circumscribed to reach one of the following conclusions:

- i. There is no case to answer and the complaint is not upheld; or
- ii. That the complaint is partially upheld,
- iii. The complaint is upheld.

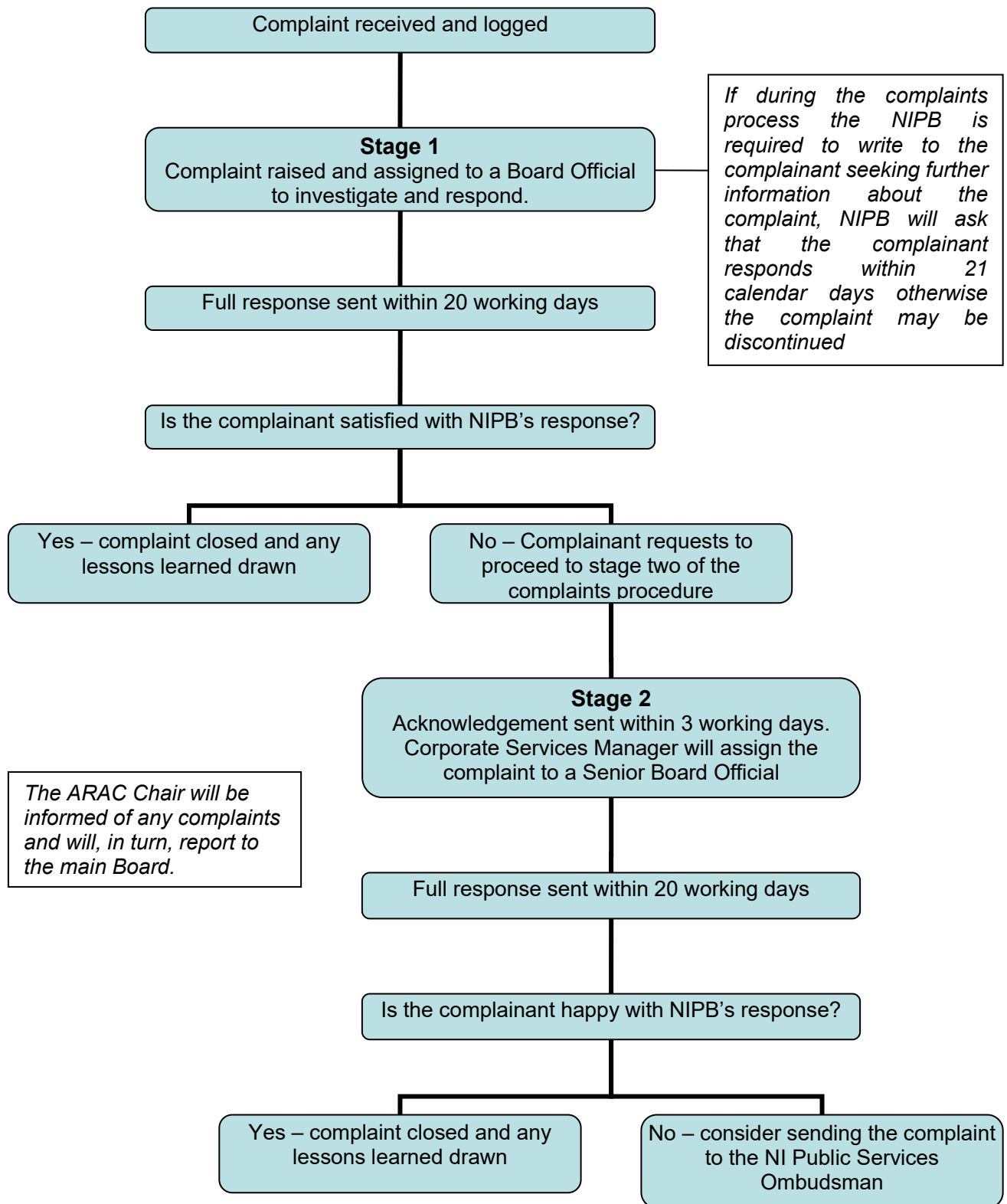
## **7. Timescales for Dealing with a Complaint**

The complainant will receive the Board's response to their complaint within 20 working days of the Policing Board having acknowledged receipt of the complaint. If there are any delays in the investigation of the complaint, the complainant will be informed of this and provided with an explanation for the delay and an estimated date for the completion of the investigation.



### 8. Complaints Process Flow Chart

A flow chart detailing the various stages of the complaints process is included below:



**9. If the complainant remains dissatisfied**

If, after following the two internal stages of the Policing Board's complaints procedure, the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will be advised they may wish to consider submitting their complaint directly to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman:

**Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman**

**33 Wellington Place**

**Belfast**

**BT1 6HN**

**Freepost:** Freepost NIPSO

**Telephone:** (028) 9023 3821

**Text Phone:** (028) 9089 7789

**Freephone:** 0800 34 34 24

**Email:** [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

**Web:** <https://nipso.org.uk/>

### **10. Amending the procedure**

Where it is concluded that a policy, process or procedure has given rise to the complaint, the Chief Executive will be responsible for ensuring that remedial action is taken to address that policy or procedure. The relevant Committee of the Board will be asked to agree any proposed changes and if the Committee agrees, the Board will be asked to ratify and adopt the change.

### **11. Compensation/financial recompense**

The Policing Board does not have the statutory discretionary authority to pay compensation in relation to a complaint which is upheld. The Policing Board's priority is to undertake a fair, thorough and proportionate investigation into complaints properly submitted to it. If the complaint is found in favour of the complainant the Board will endeavor to put the complainant back in the position they were in before the Board's failure occurred. A further priority for the Board is to identify any weaknesses in its policies or procedures and address these to ensure it does not happen again.

### **12. Review of this policy**

This Complaints Policy and Procedure will be reviewed every 3 years by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

### **13. Review of Complaints Received**

The Strategic Planning & Governance Manager will, once a month, review the Complaints Register to ensure all complaints are being managed proactively. He/She will also review

that all new complaints have been allocated to an appropriate member of staff. Finally he/she will ensure that the timescales for dealing with a complaint are being met, and if not that the complainant is being updated and advised of the reasons for delay.

The Policing Board's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee are provided with a quarterly update on the number of complaints received and the outcome of each complaint. The ARAC Chair will report to the Board details of complaints received and outcome. An annual overview of complaints received will also be reported on in the Policing Board's Annual Report.

#### **14. Unacceptable Behaviour and Actions by Complainants**

The Policing Board acknowledges that making a complaint can be a stressful time which potentially can cause a complainant to act out of character. While the Board will strive to demonstrate patience and sensitivity towards complainants in the event of unacceptable behavior the Board will consider invoking the Policing Board's Unacceptable Behaviour Policy (<https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/complaints-and-internal-dispute-resolution>).

In the event that a complainant fails to respond to a written communication during the investigation of their complaint within a reasonable time period (21 calendar days) the Policing Board will consider whether it should conclude that the complainant does not wish to pursue the complaint any further. If after such consideration, it is decided that the complainant does not wish to engage further the complainant will be informed in writing that the Policing Board is concluding its investigation.

### **15. Screening the Policy for Section 75 Issues**

This policy has been subject to a section 75 impact assessment, and it was concluded that an equality impact assessment is not required. At each policy review (every 3 years), or earlier if required, a section 75 impact assessment will be completed. This will be reviewed as above in the light of complaints received.

### **16. What this policy does not cover.**

#### **A. Complaints against PSNI officers**

In line with the provisions of Section 52 (1) (b) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, all such complaints must be directed to the Police Ombudsman's Office for consideration. Details on how to make a complaint to the Police Ombudsman can be found on its website (<https://www.policeombudsman.org/Complaints/English>)

#### **B. Complaints concerning a decision taken by PSNI Pensions Branch (as Pensions Administrator) or taken by the NIPB (as Scheme Manager and/or Injury Benefits Administrator) concerning the handling of a Police Pension or Injury on Duty Award**

All such complaints should be raised under the appropriate Internal Dispute Resolution procedure stated below:

- b. PSNI Pensions Branch Administration – Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure(<https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/sites/nipb/files/media-files/psni-pension-branchidrpv2.pdf>)

c. NIPB – Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure

[Complaints and Internal Dispute Resolution | Northern Ireland Policing Board](https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk)  
[\(\[nipolicingboard.org.uk\]\(https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk\)\)](https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk)

C. Complaints relating to the Board’s Selected Medical Practitioner (SMP)

All such complaints should be raised under the SMP Complaints Policy

(<https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/sites/nipb/files/media-files/smp-complaint-policy.pdf>)

D. Instances where there is a recognised route of appeal within an existing NIPB policy or procedure relating to the subject matter.

E. Complaints relating to the actions of individual Policing Board Members, in their capacity as Policing Board Members. Members are bound by the Policing Board’s Code of Conduct and issues relating to individual conduct should be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

**Appendix 1 - Customer Service Standards – Our Commitment to You**

Our commitment is to treat any individual who wishes to submit a complaint about The Northern Ireland Policing Board with respect. The following customer service standards are integral to the service we wish to provide.

**Standards**

**Indicators**

Being respectful

We will treat those with whom The Board engages with courtesy, respect and dignity.

Being clear

We will be plain and clear in our communications, oral and written.

Being accessible

We will endeavor to ensure our procedures are accessible. If you need additional help or support in engaging with us we will facilitate that where it is reasonable and affordable within the finite resources we have available to us.

Understanding

We will seek to have a complete understanding of your complaint and we will advise you at the earliest stage possible if **we are unable to help or advise you of** the limits of our ability to help if that is the case.

**Appendix 2– Complaint Investigation Report**

**Northern Ireland Policing Board Complaint Investigation Report**

<b>Name of Complainant</b>
<b>Reference Number</b>
<b>Investigation Officer</b>
<b>Contents</b> <i>All pages should be numbered, and the contents page should detail where each section of the report, plus any appendices, can be found</i>
<b>Introduction and Background</b> <i>After reading this section the reader should understand:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Why the investigation was deemed necessary</i></li><li>• <i>The remit of the investigation</i></li><li>• <i>Why the person carrying out the investigation was selected for the role</i></li><li>• <i>Any other factors regarding the organisation or individuals that may be relevant</i></li></ul>



## **Methodology**

*In this section the Investigating Official should detail how they conducted the investigation. If this involved interviewing people, a full list of interviewees should be given, together with a brief rationale as to why they were interviewed i.e. their position in the organisation or if there were eye witnesses.*

*If the investigation involved activities such as reviewing documentation, or watching videos these should be detailed.*

## **Findings**

*This will be the largest section of the report. Here, the Investigating Official will describe what he/she found, how evidence was evaluated and what he / she believes are the contributing factors to the situation. If there are mitigating factors that have contributed in some way to the situation, these should be described in full.*

*Consistencies and inconsistencies should also be commented upon and explanations given if known.*

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

*The Investigating Official should refer back to the original letter of complaint. Then he/she should state whether, following the findings what the conclusions are.*

*If a process or procedure has not been followed or an individual has behaved inappropriately, this is the ideal place to outline what went wrong and what should have happened instead. After reading this it should be clear exactly what the Investigating Official believed happened.*

*Recommendations should be included and could include: training, introduction/updating of policies and procedures, initiation of disciplinary proceedings.*

Upheld

Not upheld

Partially upheld

## **Appendices**

*These should be clearly labelled and contain information that is relevant to the investigation, but had no place in the main body of the report. Typical appendices include:*

- *Copies of signed witness statements*
- *Copies of documents reviewed during the investigation process*
- *Copies of the interview questions used, and guidance given to interviewees about the investigation process*

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (*Investigating Official*)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**For completion by Investigating Official**

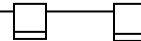
**Date Complaint was received** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Acknowledgement was issued** \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Response Issued within 20 Days**      **Yes**      **No**      **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**If no provide reason** \_\_\_\_\_

**Any follow-up received from complainant requesting a review of the complaint**      **Y**      **N**



#### DOCUMENT TITLE

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**Northern Ireland Policing Board  
Complaints Policy**

#### ONLINE FORMAT

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#### DISCLAIMER

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While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this document, the Northern Ireland Policing Board will not be held liable for any inaccuracies that may be contained within.

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