

Q2c: Please consider each element of the draft MCHP outlined below and comment on any changes or additions.

Complaints should be dealt with in no more than two stages; an initial ‘frontline response’ based on early resolution and a stage 2 ‘investigation’ where early resolution is not possible and a complaint needs to be thoroughly investigated.

HEALTH SECTOR

Organisation name	Response
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	Broadly speaking this represents the current NIAS complaints handling model, with the only difference being our model does not split this into two defined stages. On receipt of a complaint, we identify whether the complaint would be suitable for local resolution (which emulates the NIPSO proposal for a frontline response) and highlight this to the staff member assigned to take forward. With our complainant centred approach, the complainant then advises whether they are satisfied with the resolution offered. If not, a full investigation is then undertaken and a formal response provided. Our view is that this two-stage model could reduce the opportunities for complaints to be successfully resolved within the maximum 5-day timescale prescribed and result in more complaints being dealt with formally, at Stage 2. NIAS is unique in comparison to the other Trusts in that we provide a regional service where operational staff are "on the road" for their 12-hour shift and rarely return to base. Therefore, unlike other Trusts where staff can be approached in their place of work, the opportunity to talk to our staff isn't as flexible. In addition to this, the majority of our operational staff work a four on four off working shift pattern, which would add further challenges of resolving a complaint informally, as proposed by NIPSO, within 5 working days for Stage 1.
Southern Health & Social Care Trust – email submission	SHSCT is regulated by the Department of Health (DoH) and its Regional Complaints Policy. Therefore, the Trust considers that DoH must review and respond to aspects of NIPSO's proposal. SHSCT has shared this with DoH and awaits its input. SHSCT will share with NIPSO any input received from DoH.

Southern Health & Social Care Trust – online submission	No response to this question.
Health & Social Care Board	<p>The HSCB has a number of concerns regarding the suggested two stage approach. It feels that to re-introduce a formal 2 stages (albeit a different model) moves away from the single tier process, which was introduced in 2009 to provide a strengthened, more robust local resolution stage; an enhanced role for commissioners in monitoring, performance management and learning; improved arrangements for driving forward quality improvements across the HSC; and improved arrangements for the delivery of responses to complainants.</p> <p>The HSCB acknowledges that the stage 1 and 2 model as contained in the consultation document more or less outlines current HSC processes, in that complaints are sought to be resolved 'on the spot' by members of staff and if this is not possible, escalated; and more serious or complex complaints are routinely and automatically dealt with in a more formalised 'stage 2' manner. However we have concerns about the 'formalisation' of this approach and the impact this could potentially have on frontline staff who would struggle to undertake the administrative requirements associated with this formalised approach, in already highly pressurised working environments.</p> <p>To clarify, the HSCB fully supports and encourages complaints being resolved as close to their source as possible and in an 'on the spot' approach. We also understand the ethos and reasoning behind "the organisation records details of all complaints, the outcome and any action taken and use this data to analyse themes and trends."</p> <p>The HSCB's view is however that to formalise this 2 stage approach and introduce different timescales into what in the majority of cases may well be an informal resolution, creates bureaucracy, and in the majority of instances, frontline health and social care staff may not have the time or capacity to complete this, leaving them at risk of being criticised for non-compliance.</p>
NHS	No
Woodbrooke Medical Practice	<p>As a partner of a public body providing GP services, I understand that complaints are a useful tool for feedback and learning on the care that we provide to our patients and service users. My surgery upholds an open and honest culture regarding complaints and I agree that a simplified, standardised complaint system across the public sector will make it easier for people to raise complaints.</p> <p>I am however concerned that while the proposed changes will allow this, they may also over complicate the current procedure making it a cumbersome process, particularly for stage 1 (previously informal) complaints which may then escalate, when they could have been easily resolved through prompt and proportionate handling.</p>
HSC Trust Complaints Forum	The current HSC Complaints procedure is a flattened one tier process which is better than a number of stages that can only elongate the process for the complainant unnecessarily. The current HSC Complaints procedure does have an

	"informal" expectation similar to what is proposed as the Stage 1 process, in that staff on the ground do attempt to address any issues brought to them "on the spot", which is often successful and has a quicker and better outcome. However, the NIPSO draft model appears to suggest formalising that stage, which we would question if this is necessary.
Patient Client Council	Our experience to date recognises the need for early resolution and processes thereafter to fully investigate a complaint where early resolution cannot be achieved. Outlining indicative timescales for each stage would be important in managing expectation
General Medical Council	No response to this question.
Medical Protection Society	MPS agrees with this proposal as it is already a feature of the HSC Complaints Procedure, which allows resolution by frontline staff in appropriate cases and a formal investigation/ response in the remainder.
CHASNI	Agree
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	Agree that the number of stages needs to be kept to the minimum but that this needs to be clearly defined and streamlined.

EDUCATION SECTOR

Organisation name	Response
Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)	<p>CCEA's complaints procedure includes a three-stage approach before onward signposting to NIPSO. The three-stage approach involves:</p> <p>Stage 1 - Informal</p> <p>This stage follows the frontline response stage outlined in NIPSOs complaints handling procedure. Informal complaints in CCEA also include an investigation however, this is usually conducted by the service providers of the area in question. CCEA would prefer to retain the 'informal' titling as the use of 'frontline' is more in keeping with the terminology regarding Covid-19. Furthermore, complaints can be raised against processes that are not deemed frontline by organisations.</p> <p>Acknowledgements are issued within five working days and a full response within twenty working days unless notified of a reason for delay in responding.</p> <p>Stage 2 – Formal</p> <p>This stage follows the investigation stage outlined in NIPSOs complaints handling procedure. Formal complaints are investigated independently of the area of business where the complaint relates to and are managed by CCEAs Business Assurance team who play an important governance role within the organisation.</p> <p>Stage 3 – Internal Review</p> <p>The final stage in CCEA's process is an Internal Review which is investigated by a senior manager not involved in the previous stages. CCEA believes this is particularly important for those complaints which enter the process due to the nature of the complaint or method of submission, at Stage 2 thereby allowing an independent review by CCEA.</p>
Spires Integrated Primary School	The Informal Stage was seen as an important part of the process and is still needed. Sometimes parents only wish to be listened to and this is important.
Belfast Metropolitan College	Disagree we believe there should be an informal stage, a formal stage and an appeals stage. The appeals stage allows the complaint to be considered by independent senior members of staff who have had no involvement in the complaint to date, ensuring transparency and fairness. We currently have an Appeals stage in our joint sector policy and this is robust and works well. We do not believe this is in the best interests of the customer. Without an Appeals stage, the customer may feel more aggrieved that the College is "washing its hand of the matter" by immediately referring on to NIPSO. In addition this may unnecessarily increase the volume of low level referrals to NIPSO.

South West Regional College	SWC disagrees we believe there should be an informal stage, a formal stage and an appeals stage. The appeals stage allows the complaint to be considered by independent senior members of staff who have had no involvement in the complaint to date, ensuring transparency and fairness. We currently have an Appeals stage in our joint sector policy and this is robust and works well. We do not believe this is in the best interests of the customer. Without an Appeals stage, the customer may feel more aggrieved that the College is "washing it's hand of the matter" by immediately referring on to NIPSO. In addition this may unnecessarily increase the volume of low level referrals to NIPSO.
Northern Regional College	Disagree: we believe there should be an informal stage, a formal stage and an appeals stage. The appeals stage allows the complaint to be considered by independent senior members of staff who have had no involvement in the complaint to date, ensuring transparency and fairness. We currently have an Appeals stage in our joint sector policy and this is robust and works well. We do not believe this is in the best interests of the customer. Without an Appeals stage, the customer may feel more aggrieved that the College is "washing it's hand of the matter" by immediately referring on to NIPSO. In addition this may unnecessarily increase the volume of low level referrals to NIPSO.
Education Authority - School Development Service	<p>The Education Authority has been engaging with NIPSO in relation to reviewing the model complaints procedure for schools since 2016. At that time a five-stage procedure was in operation and in 2018 EA, in conjunction with educational partners, launched a revised two-stage model school complaints procedure.</p> <p>Stage One – overseen by the school principal Stage Two – overseen by the board of governors</p> <p>We are content that the model procedure allows for robust investigation of complaints and provides reassurance that the issues are fully and completely open to scrutiny. This would be in line with the NIPSO view that complaints handling procedures have two stages. However, it is our observation that 'Frontline Response' already happens in schools – it is considered good practice to engage with 'customers' in the day to day work in school and is reflected in the communications section of the 2 stage EA model procedure. This is not part of the two stages of the procedure and encourages immediate resolution of any issues brought forward. Schools generally endeavour to address every matter at the frontline, given the ongoing and very close relationship with parents, carers and other people who engage with schools.</p>
Education Authority - Corporate Complaints Service	<p>This is agreed. The EA Corporate Complaints Procedure previously had in place a three stage process as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stage 1A (frontline resolution – response within five working days) - Stage 1B (Head of service or above investigation – response within 20 working days)

	<p>- Stage 2 (Independent Director-led investigation – response within 25 working days)</p> <p>It was found that the above elongated the complaints process and resolution with some complaints taking months to resolve or for lessons to be learned. The EA Corporate Complaints Service have now implemented a new two stage process and feedback to date has been positive.</p>
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	What if there is an investigation – need to speak to others etc? does that mean it automatically goes to stage 2 because it cannot be managed by little or no investigation?
Northern Ireland National Association for Head Teachers	<p>A new complaints procedure administered by DE must include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An informal stage that emphasises the importance of relationships between school staff and parents and the wider school community • The importance of Boards of Governors must be recognised and they must have an officially recognised stage in the process of complaint escalation
Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education	Agree the process should be as simple as possible.
NI Teachers Collaborate	<p>Disagree – we believe there should be an informal stage, a formal stage and an appeals stage. The appeals stage allows the complaint to be considered by independent senior members of staff who have had no involvement in the complaint to date, ensuring transparency and fairness.</p> <p>We currently have an Appeals stage in our joint sector policy and this is robust and works well.</p> <p>We do not believe this is in the best interests of the customer. Without an Appeals stage, the customer may feel more aggrieved that the College is ‘washing its hand of the matter’ by immediately referring on to NIPSO. In addition this may unnecessarily increase the volume of low level referrals to NIPSO.</p>
South Eastern Regional College	<p>Disagree; SERC believes there should be an informal stage, a formal stage and an appeals stage. The appeals stage allows the complaint to be considered by independent senior members of staff who had no involvement in the complaint to date, ensuring transparency and fairness. We currently have an Appeals stage in our joint sector policy and this is robust and works well. SERC does not believe this is in the best interests of the customer. Without an Appeals stage, the customer may feel more aggrieved that the College is ‘washing its hand of the matter’ by immediately referring on to NIPSO. In addition this may unnecessarily increase the volume of low level referrals to NIPSO.</p>

HOUSING SECTOR

Organisation name	Response
Co-Ownership Housing Association	<p>In relation to the proposals regarding having a two stage complaints process – being a frontline response and an investigation stage – we agree that organisations should endeavour to deal with a complaint if possible at the frontline stage. This is an informal process whereby the complaint can be dealt with by any member of staff. This ensures that we can attempt to resolve a person’s complaint quickly and appropriately where possible. We would estimate that we resolve three out of four complaints in this stage.</p> <p>If a complaint moves to a more formal stage, at present most organisations (including our own) have a formal two stage complaints process. The two stage process for Co-Ownership allows a manager to investigate the complaint fully and respond promptly to the customer within 20 days of the complaint being raised. Very few complaints go beyond this stage as it is only if the customer remains unhappy with the response that the second stage is needed. Our experience is that customers like the reassurance that having a Director of the organisation review their complaint brings. The process envisaged in the model complaints process is for there to be a front-line stage (where possible or appropriate) and an investigation stage – which is effectively a two stage approach before the matter is escalated to an independent external review by NIPSO.</p> <p>For customers, we feel that such a change in the handling of complaints will be a very different experience for them in that they will be used to having complaints dealt with formally at a first stage process and a second stage where the complaint is reconsidered by another person in the organisation. This will be the experience of customers in other contexts whereby decisions made by certain bodies are subject to an internal review by another person in the organisation.</p> <p>We appreciate that it is important that complaints are dealt with in a timely manner and that from this perspective it would be a shorter timescale if the matter is escalated to the NIPSO after the investigation stage. However, this should not prevent customers from being in a position to escalate the complaint internally to someone senior in an organisation to address the issues raised in the complaint which would be quicker.</p> <p>Co-Ownership has only had two complaints escalate to NIPSO (both within the past 12 months). However, on the basis of the proposed new process we would expect that the number of these would be significantly higher and this could result in the customer complaint being resolved much slower than with the current two-stage internal approach.</p>

	<p>Additionally, responding to an Ombudsman complaint takes significant time and resource as a lot of background information is required to bring the complaint handler up to speed.</p> <p>Therefore, on balance it would be preferable to allow some flexibility for organisations to allow a formal two stage process where the timeframes during which each component is dealt with are clearly defined and adhered to. This may depend on the nature of the sector involved and what is custom and practice in that sector at this stage.</p>
Clanmil Housing Association	<p>Even though Clanmil currently operates a 3-stage process, we welcome the proposal to move to a 2-stage process. We recognise that the effectiveness of the process will depend on the Housing Association's ability to empower investigating officers to resolve and respond to complaints consistently, professionally and in a timely manner. This will be achieved through training and shift in culture.</p>
Choice Housing Association	<p>The Association acknowledges that no more than 2 formal stages is preferable. However, Choice feels that 2 formal investigation stages are required to ensure that complex complaints are robustly addressed. In our experience 2 investigation stages provides opportunity for Internal and external liaison with relevant stakeholders. Address equality issues and or seek specialist advice/guidance regarding complex mental health issues. Oversight and scrutiny at senior level ensuring organisation commitment to best practice in customer service Affords the opportunity to identify and authorise required procedural changes and Ensures complainant feels fully 'heard' by the public body in question. This is particularly important as a social landlord as we do not interact with service users on a one off basis- we have a enduring relationship with our tenants and retaining positive relationships and resolving issues together is key to this. The Association currently operates an informal stage where we seek to resolve complaints at front line level. these are generally low level complaints / enquiries that can be resolved by the relevant Officer. There is a separate two stage process for formal complaints where front line resolution is not possible and a higher level of investigation is required. This includes a Chief Executive response at Stage 1. and an independent panel review at Stage 2. The Association feels the effectiveness of its current complaints procedure is reflected in low number of complaints being referred to NIPSO. In our experience, given the complexity of the majority of housing related complaints we envisage the majority of complaints automatically progressing to Stage 2 for the required level of investigation. A primary concern of the proposed model relates to complainants who remain unsatisfied after the new 'Stage 2 investigation'. The proposed model states that such complainants, subject to satisfying the test for maladministration, progress to NIPSO. This however raises the following concerns. There will be an increase in referrals to NIPSO. Currently NIPSO investigations can take up to 50 weeks which arguably does not offer timely resolution. Timely resolution is a key component of any complaints process. This is particularly concerning in relation to housing matters which can relate to key issues such as access to housing, serious disrepair and or disability related matters. Has consideration been given to increased</p>

	<p>referrals and the impact this will have on already long investigation timeframes? Has /will an equality impact assessment be undertaken to determine the impact extended resolution times will have on specific complainants? Not all complaints will meet the definition of maladministration, so does this mean there will be a number of complainants who cannot advance to further consideration. Has/will an equality impact assessment be undertaken to ascertain types of complaints/complainants who may be affected by this? As previously stated we agree that early resolution is a key element of any complaints process but it should not be to the detriment of the complainant securing comprehensive, timely, thorough and reasoned response to their complaint. We look forward in exploring these issues more fully in the sector engagement forums however we would ask that further examination of the nature of housing complaints to ascertain fully impact of proposed model on complainant.</p>
Ark Housing Association	<p>Agree with the two stage approach, however further clarification is needed in regard to what would be deemed as a frontline response.</p>
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	<p>It is noted that, the English Housing Ombudsman allows for a 3 stage process where organisations can demonstrate an overriding need to have such a process. Whilst not advocating any formal 3 stage process at this stage, the Housing Executive believes that its own 3 tier approach (including an informal stage) for housing matters has worked well for both customers and staff (allowing relevant management oversight of issues they are responsible for). The Housing Executive has always taken the approach that complaints should be investigated proportionately / thoroughly and not by the person who is being complained about. The proposed model of frontline resolution would potentially weaken these principles in terms of demanding turnaround times and allowing the complaint to be responded to by anyone. The proposed model also has the potential to blur lines between businesses as usual and formal complaints and create confusion for staff as to when an issue should be recorded as a complaint. Frontline resolution has always been an important part of Housing Executive customer service with the formal complaints process there to support any cases where this is not possible. In any two stage process the Housing Executive would be of the view that organisations should have some flexibility in deciding what should be contained within each stage. Again this is more in line with the model adopted by the English Housing Ombudsman which does not specify where Stage 1 may occur and has the ability to set any frontline activity outside of a formal complaints procedure. The Housing Executive has seen benefits to customers in a two investigation stage process, as customers when receiving the detailed explanation at first investigation stage have been able to correct misunderstandings and provide clarification of their circumstances and viewpoint in escalating to a second stage investigation. If there is only one investigation stage then this benefit is lost to the customer as the next step will be referral to NIPSO who can only consider the administration of the case not any decision making. This may lead to increased customer frustration and confusion about how to have matters addressed and delay in achieving the same. It is noted that the draft complaints handling model definition for frontline resolution</p>

	<p>includes "things which require and on the spot explanation or action". Again, this would have the real potential to cause confusion as to the distinction between business as usual and complaints handling. In an organisation the size of the Housing Executive this would have the potential to lead to the recording of thousands of "complaints" each year but bring no real benefits to the customer. Rather it will simply create a bureaucratic industry with an array of associated staff and system costs. The Housing Executive would again propose that formal complaints resolution may well take place within service delivery offices but that the need to escalate to a line of management (within or outside that office) may be a useful determiner as to whether the matter constitutes a formal complaint (requiring to be recorded separately as such) or business as usual. This is connected with and should be read in conjunction with our comments on the definition of a complaint. On reflection, the Housing Executive's preference would be to retain a two investigation stage process to be supplemented by business as usual activities which would include explanation and initial remedy at initial point of service delivery where the customer wished to engage in this. The customer would, of course, have the right to enter into the formal complaints process at any time of their choosing. This element of customer choice is an important concept as, as noted above often the customer simply wishes for the matter to be fixed as soon as possible.</p>
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations	<p>NIFHA acknowledges that while no more than 2 formal stages are preferable, further clarification is needed in regard to what would be deemed as a frontline response. Many housing associations felt that 2 formal investigation stages are required to ensure that complex complaints are robustly addressed.</p> <p>Being able to conduct 2 investigation stages provide opportunity for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal and external liaison with relevant stakeholders • Address equality issues and or seek specialist advice/guidance regarding complex mental health issues • Oversight and scrutiny at senior level ensuring organisation commitment to best practice in customer service • Affords the opportunity to identify and authorise required procedural changes • Ensures complainant feels fully 'heard' by the public body in question. This is particularly important as a social landlord as housing associations do not interact with service users on a one-off basis- and have an enduring relationship with tenants and retaining positive relationships and resolving issues together is key to this. <p>The Associations operate an informal stage where resolve complaints at front line level is sought– these are generally low-level complaints or enquiries that can be resolved by the relevant Officer.</p>

	<p>There is a separate two stage process for formal complaints where front-line resolution is not possible and a higher level of investigation is required. This might include a Chief Executive response at Stage 1; and an independent panel review at Stage 2. The Association feels the effectiveness of its current complaints' procedure is reflected in low number of complaints being referred to NIPSO.</p> <p>Given the complexity of the majority of housing related complaints the majority of complaints automatically progressing to Stage 2 for the required level of investigation. A primary concern of the proposed model relates to complainants who remain unsatisfied after the new 'Stage 2 investigation'. The proposed model states that such complainants, subject to satisfying the test for maladministration, progress to NIPSO. This however raises the following concerns,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be an increase in referrals to NIPSO. Currently NIPSO investigations can take up to 50 weeks which arguably does not offer timely resolution. Timely resolution is a key component of any complaints process. This is particularly concerning in relation to housing matters which can relate to key issues such as access to housing, serious disrepair and or disability related matters. • Has consideration been given to increased referrals and the impact this will have on already long investigation timeframes? Has/will an equality impact assessment be undertaken to determine the impact extended resolution times will have on specific complainants? • Not all complaints will meet the definition of maladministration- does this mean there will be a number of complainants who cannot advance to further consideration. <p>Has /will an equality impact assessment been undertaken to ascertain types of complaints/ complainants who may be affected by this?</p> <p>We agree that early resolution is a key element of any complaints process, but it should not be to the detriment of the complainant securing comprehensive, timely, thorough, and reasoned response to their complaint.</p> <p>Therefore, the current system having 3 tiers allows consideration and indeed reconsideration of any decisions from a</p>
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	<p>range of perspectives. This means that rarely does the Ombudsman have any finding from that.</p> <p>A change to a 2-stage approach will depend on the Housing Association's ability to empower investigating officers to resolve and respond to complaints consistently, professionally and in a timely manner. This will be achieved through training and shift in culture.</p> <p>NIFHA and its members look forward in exploring these issues more fully in the sector engagement forums however we suggest further examination of the nature of housing complaints is undertaken to ascertain fully impact of proposed model on complainant.</p> <p>We would also add any standardised definition, reporting and methodology should be cross referred with the HA reporting such as DfC Regulatory Guide to ensure they are consistent and avoid dual reporting and recording that are not consistent or duplicate effort.</p>
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Organisation name	Response
Ards and North Down Borough Council	<p>In order to do this, it is essential that all relevant staff, including front line staff, are given the empowerment and training to investigate and resolve a complaint.. Where a complaint is not made directly to the department involved, call handlers and others who are likely to be the first point of contact will be trained to identify a complaint and allocate it to a contact point within each department at which it will be determined who shall be the stage 1 responder, and the complainant will be notified promptly who this will be.</p> <p>If a complaint cannot be resolved within 20 working days then it will be assigned to a manager to further investigate and resolve.</p> <p>We agree that if the customer is still unhappy with the outcome at stage 2 the customer should be at this stage referred to the Ombudsman.</p>
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	<p>Agree that there should be a two stage approach to complaints handling to make the complaints process quicker and more streamlined. A 3 stage approach elongates the complaints process for everyone and the third stage is a repeat of stage 2.</p>
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	<p>Agree with this point. In advance of NIPSO launching the MCHP Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council have recently reviewed our Complaints Handling to reduce it to a two stage process this is due to go live in the coming months.</p>
Newry, Mourne & Down District Council	<p>Agreed. Two stages is sufficient to fully investigate and respond to a complaint.</p>
Fermanagh & Omagh District Council	<p>Agreed.</p>
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	<p>This is supported by the Council but it should be noted that this approach has strengths and weaknesses. Resolving most complaints from at first point of contact allows for the most prompt response. Additionally, some complainants will exhaust a multi-stage formal complaint system simply because it is available, regardless of whether further stages will generate a different outcome. On the other hand, it is likely that this proposed two staged approach will consume greater resource by senior management of Council and result in some complaints taking longer to resolve than the present format.</p>
Belfast City Council	<p>Council considers this to be a modern and sensible approach that both simplifies the complaints process for customers and council. And importantly, will serve to help reduce the frustration sometimes felt by customers who perhaps feel they are engaging in a long drawn out procedure.</p>

Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	Yes, we agree that this approach is best for the Customer and the public body. This saves time and effort and should resolve complaints more quickly.
Mid Ulster Council	No response to this question.
Northern Ireland Local Government Officer's Superannuation Committee	NILGOSC currently has a formal two stage IDRP in accordance with its regulations (see Regulations 79-89 of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (SRNI 2014/188)). The initial front line response is generally before the formal two stage process. The IDRP is mandated by the Regulations and must be followed by NILGOSC. If NIPSO was to introduce a model procedure different to the IDRP in respect of NILGOSC, it would require the Department for Communities/Northern Ireland Assembly to amend the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Organisation name	Response
Department of Education	DE's current Complaints Policy is broadly consistent with the model complaints handling procedure on which NIPSO is consulting, with only minor variations from this that we will reflect upon following any published model.
Department for Communities	No response to this question.
Department for Justice	<p>(NIPSO suggest this will deal with straightforward complaints requiring little or no investigation) - All DoJ Stage 1 complaints are properly investigated. Several of our complaints are of a complex nature and require a detailed response. The Department believe that it is important to conduct an investigation at the outset of a complaint being raised. Our current policy allows for a 15 day time limit at Stage 1 of our process. While we understand the intention of NIPSO to address a high number of complaints as quickly as possible, we believe that it is important to properly investigate any complaint raised to provide an assurance to ourselves that the complaint is handled appropriately, and to ensure that the complainant receives a professional service.</p> <p>With only around 10% of our complaints currently going to Stage 2, this would dramatically increase that figure. We would not be in favour of a complaint should automatically proceed to Stage 2 if it cannot be dealt with within 5 days, or if the complainant refuses to engage with the Department. This would remove the complainant's right of appeal internally, which in our view would be a regressive step. It is also likely to increase the number of 'unresolved' complaints being submitted to NIPSO.</p>
Department for Health	<p>Having considered the suggested formal two stage approach outlined in the MCHP, I would like to provide some thoughts on your consideration.</p> <p>When developing the 2009 HSC Complaints Procedure, referred to earlier, it was agreed that the procedure would change from a two tier procedure to a single stage internal procedure with onward referral to the Ombudsman, where necessary. This resulted in the HSC Complaints Procedure, unlike those in some other sectors, being a simple and more accessible process with an appropriate focus on local resolution.</p> <p>Resolution and the successful handling of complaints at the frontline, or as close to the point of service delivery as possible is the ideal outcome for complainants and service providers alike. An 'on-the-spot' apology, explanation or action to resolve the matter in question, will in most instances see the complaint closed with no further action</p>

	<p>necessary. With frontline resolution being encouraged, this resulted in a more formal investigative approach being taken for those more serious or complex complaints or for complaints that remained unresolved following frontline intervention.</p> <p>Whilst this is similar to what is being outlined in your consultation paper, identifying frontline response as a formalised stage appears to re-introduce a formal two stage process, moving away from the single tier process introduced for the HSC to provide that focus on frontline resolution.</p> <p>I would also like to draw your attention to the description provided in respect of those complaints that require investigation under stage 2 of the process:</p> <p><i>“Where the complainant is not satisfied with the frontline response, or refuses to engage at the frontline, or where the complaint is complex, serious or ‘high-risk’.”</i></p> <p>The current HSC Complaints Procedure allows for complainants who wish to make a complaint about a regulated establishment or agency, to go directly to the HSC Trust responsible for commissioning the care. Whilst complainants are encouraged to raise their concerns, at the outset, with the registered provider or agency, it is their choice with whom they wish to pursue their complaint.</p> <p>Whilst I appreciate this issue may be unique to the health and social care sector, I would suggest that an amendment may be required to the current wording to reflect this position.</p> <p>I have reservations about how the formalised processes in respect of complaints resolved at the frontline can be administered. This runs the risk of placing an additional administrative burden on frontline staff who are already under extreme pressure. However, I am of the view that this will be an area requiring further consideration and discussion during the development of the complaints procedure for the health and social care sector, and my officials will be happy to engage.</p>
Department for Economy	<p>We are content with this in the interests of consistency across the public sector and of benefit to the complainant, but currently operate a 3 stage procedure in which complaints can be resolved at middle management level without reaching our final stage 3. We anticipate the need for increased involvement of senior management under the proposed 2 stage process and significant resource implications.</p>

National Museums NI	I am pleased to advise that NMNI's CHP is in parallel to that which is proposed in your MCHP. We have a defined two stage process and our time frames are exactly as you have proposed for both first stage and second stage (First response & Investigation).
Land & Property Services	LPS currently operates a two stage process, but has also built in follow-up periods for both stages should putting together a response prove complex.
Northern Ireland Audit Office	NIAO agrees with this proposal in principle. However, the only case where frontline staff would be in a position to respond directly to the complainant, without reference to the audit team, would be where the issue being raised does not meet the definition of 'complaint' as in our policy. The nature of complaints raised with our Office tend to be complicated and, in most cases, requires significant input from audit staff. In our current arrangements we are allowing 20 days for stage 1, but strive to address the matter within a shorter timeframe.
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	PBNI supports this and has both a local resolution stage (frontline response) where the appropriate first line manager seeks to resolve the complaint. We also have a second formal stage whereby a Decision Officer (one management level up, usually an Assistant Director) and Investigating Officer (usually an Area Manager not previously involved with complainant) are appointed. The Investigating Officer has 25 days to conduct a thorough formal investigation and complete an investigation report which is sent to the Decision Officer who makes the final decision based on the findings in the report. Complaints can be complex and PBNI have found that this time period is necessary so that a robust and thorough investigation is conducted. There is also an opportunity for the complainant to appeal the decision through an appeals process (internal review).
The Consumer Council Northern Ireland	Agree. A complaints process should be simple and easy to follow, any more than two steps can make a process and the investigation unnecessarily complex and protracted.
Charity Commission for Northern Ireland	It is agreed that a complaint handling procedure should include no more than two stages. This is particularly relevant where the organisation has a small staff number and therefore does not have the capacity to undertake a number of complaint investigations across different stages, often duplicating previous investigatory work. This approach also supports resolving a complaint matter promptly and appropriately, while allowing a full investigation to be undertaken should that be required. It should be recognised that both stages may involve the team that initially provided the service or dealt with the issues being complained about. Some clarification on where conflicts of interest may arise and how they should be dealt with would be welcomed, for example, if it is appropriate for a manager to contact the complainant to discuss a complaint about their own team in an attempt to resolve the matter.

OTHER

Organisation name	Response
Information Commissioner's Office	No response to this question.
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	This is the model we have been using in Scotland for some time. The benefits we have found are: there is a clear process with identified time frames that is simple for both staff and the public to understand; and a single investigation stage focuses the organisation on getting it right first time. One metric which demonstrates the benefits of moving to a simple, relatively short process is the premature rate (i.e. complaints that come straight to the Ombudsman without exhausting the local process first). Tracking this gives insight into the general complaints landscape, and can also be an early indicator of where support is needed by a particular public body or sector. Our experience was that prior to the introduction of the model, the premature rate was over 40%. This has halved and is now (under normal circumstances) around 20%. A notable example of this trend is the social landlord sector which had one of the highest premature rates prior to the introduction of the model. This may have been because, traditionally, they tended to have the highest number of stages in their individual complaints procedures. In 2011/12 the premature rate for that sector was 62%, the first full year of implementation (2012/2013) saw a drop to 52% and by 2019/20 that was 18%. Concerns were expressed in advance of the changes in the models that they could lead to a significant increase to complaints to the SPSO. While we have seen an increase in complaints to us over the last 10 years, in 2011/12 we received 4,077 complaints and in 2019/20 4,300, it is difficult to link this solely to changes in the procedures. Ombudsman schemes in jurisdictions where procedures have not been in place have also seen an increase over the same time frame and our jurisdiction has changed and increased over the same period.
Alliance Party	Where possible, if a case moves into stage 2 'investigation', then clear and concise reasoning as to why this is happening should be given to the complainant. They should also be made aware of who their personal information is being shared with and for what purpose.