



Northern Ireland
Public Services
Ombudsman

Policy and Engagement Officer

Fixed Term (18 Months)

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Candidate Information Booklet (NIPSO/EO/10-25)

2025

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1. MESSAGE FROM MARGARET KELLY, NI PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

Thank you for your interest in the position of Policy and Engagement Officer at the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

This is an exciting time to join us to help us deliver our vision of making a positive difference to people and public services in Northern Ireland.

We have a unique governance structure which reflects my position as the statutory holder of three offices – Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman and Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner for Standards. This requires a balance between appropriate controls and oversight, while preserving the independence of my role. I am accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee, and we have an independent Audit and Risk Committee who monitor our corporate governance, risk management and control systems.

We launched our new Strategic Plan in 2022-23 following consultation both internally and externally with the aim to make sure we have a relevant, modern and inclusive Ombudsman's Office for the people of Northern Ireland.

As Policy and Engagement Officer, you will play a key role in our busy Improvement, Engagement & Impact Team to help us deliver the goals in this Strategic Plan. This team play an integral role both internally and externally, engaging with the public and public bodies to share learning from the work of the Office to drive improvement in public services.

This is a challenging but rewarding role. If you are excited about the work that we undertake and believe you have the skills and experience to make a difference, I very much look forward to receiving your application.

Margaret Kelly

Northern Ireland Public
Services Ombudsman



2. WHO WE ARE

The Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) was established in April 2016 in accordance with the [Public Services Ombudsman Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#) (“the Act”). The Act replaced and extended the remit of the previous offices of Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints. Since 2016, NIPSO’s workload has doubled and the organisation continues to grow.

We are publicly funded but operate independently from all other public bodies in Northern Ireland. We currently employ approximately 60 staff and we are based in Progressive House in central Belfast.

The Ombudsman’s main role is to investigate complaints of maladministration made about public services, including complaints about Government Departments and their agencies, local Councils, health and social care, education bodies, public housing providers and a range of other public service providers. We also play a key role in contributing to broader improvement in public services by sharing the learning from both individual complaints and systemic reports (work that we call ‘Own Initiative’).

The Ombudsman is also the Local Government Commissioner for Standards, and the office investigates and where appropriate adjudicates on complaints where a Councillor is alleged to have breached the Code of Conduct for Councillors. The Ombudsman is also the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman.



3. WHAT WE DO

The Ombudsman’s role is to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are served by a fair and efficient public administration that is committed to accountability, openness, and the provision of high quality public services.

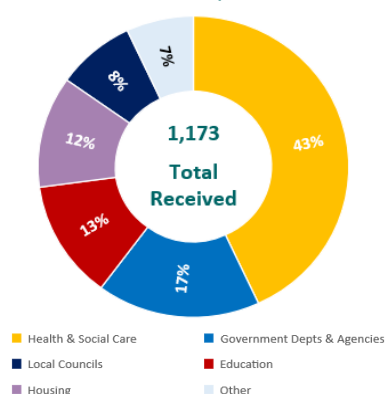
Assessing and investigating complaints of maladministration, including professional judgment in health and social care is the largest single area of our work. During 2023-24 we received 1,173 complaints¹, an increase of 118% over the period since NIPSO was established in 2016 (when 539 complaints were received).

43% of the complaints we received in 2023-24 related to Health & Social Care Services in Northern Ireland.

The other 57% of complaints related to Government Departments (17%), Education (13%), Housing (12%) and Councils (8%).

The remaining 7% were categorised as ‘other’ complaints.

Breakdown of Complaints 2023-24¹



The Public Services Ombudsman also has powers of ‘Own Initiative’ which enable an investigation of an issue where there is reasonable suspicion of systemic maladministration. In 2023-24 we published an Own Initiative report on Waiting List Communication, an overview report on Tree Preservation Orders and a follow up report on PIP and the Value of Further Evidence.

In relation to our Local Government Ethical Standards role, during 2023-24 we received 31 allegations that Councillors may have breached the Local Government Code of Conduct. These related to social media posts, disclosure of confidential information and the registration / declaration of interests.

In 2022 NIPSO established a new Improvement, Engagement & Impact Team to lead on the implementation of learning from the broad range of NIPSO’s ongoing work. This team engages with the public, public bodies and politicians to ensure the lessons learned from NIPSO’s work shape our contribution to policy, research and broader lessons for change and improvement across the public sector. The team produces key statistics, case digests, thematic reports and other publications from our investigations to ensure effective shared learning from our work for the improvement of public services.

¹ 2023-24 provisional figures

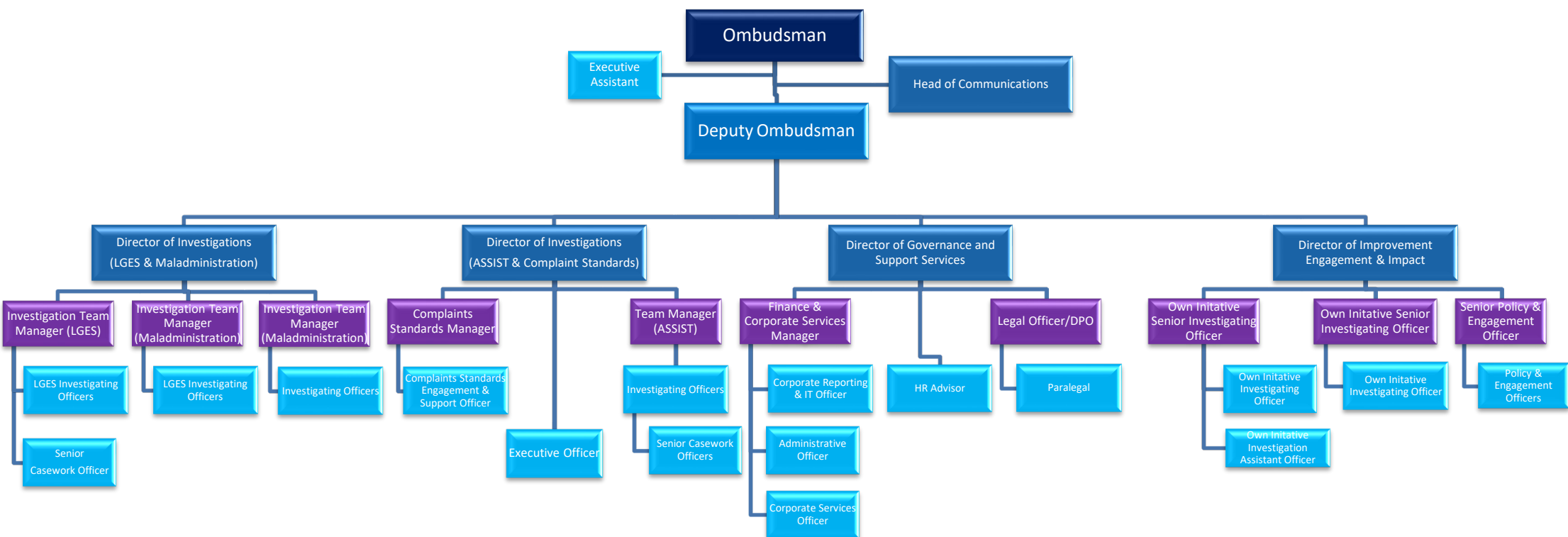
The team is expanding with the recruitment of a new Policy & Engagement Officer to play a key role in engagement with health & social care providers to help inform the implementation and development of a new model complaints handling procedure for the Health and Social Care Sector. The Engagement team will be supporting the work of the Complaints Standards function within NIPSO, which aims to transform the complaints landscape to make complaints handling processes more accessible, easier to navigate and consistent across a range of different public bodies. Further information on Complaints Standards can be found here. [Complaints standards for Northern Ireland | NIPSO](#)

Interested candidates can read more about our future plans in our [Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025](#) and our annual performance in our latest [Annual Report & Accounts 2022-2023](#).

4. OUR STRUCTURE

NIPSO has grown considerably since it was established in 2016 both in terms of functions, budget and staff numbers. As a result, NIPSO has embarked on a programme of improvement of its internal systems including the establishment of a new case handling system, a new finance system, establishment of a new records management system and we are embarking on updating the office human resource management system. The senior management team are focused on ensuring that we have effective systems to support the front-line staff of NIPSO, ensuring that we meet our statutory obligations and bring about improvements in public services through our work.

The Policy and Engagement Officer will be key in ensuring that NIPSO achieves its strategic objectives and delivering a quality service for service users in line with NIPSOs values. Our current structure is set out below:



5. OUR VISION AND VALUES

Our vision and values are very important to us and underpin everything we do as an organisation.

OUR VISION STATEMENT

Make a positive difference to people and public services in Northern Ireland by providing individual resolution and improved services through learning from complaints.

OUR PURPOSE

Investigate unresolved complaints about public bodies, uphold standards and ensure accountability for both public bodies and for local Councillors. Contribute to broader improvement by sharing the learning from both individual complaints and systemic reports.

OUR VALUES

Our **values** underpin and drive all our decisions, actions, policies, processes and systems and how we engage internally and externally.

Independence

We are open, non-partisan, unbiased, and we act with integrity.

Fairness

We are honest and impartial, ensure all views are listened to and use an evidence-based approach to our decision making.

People Focused

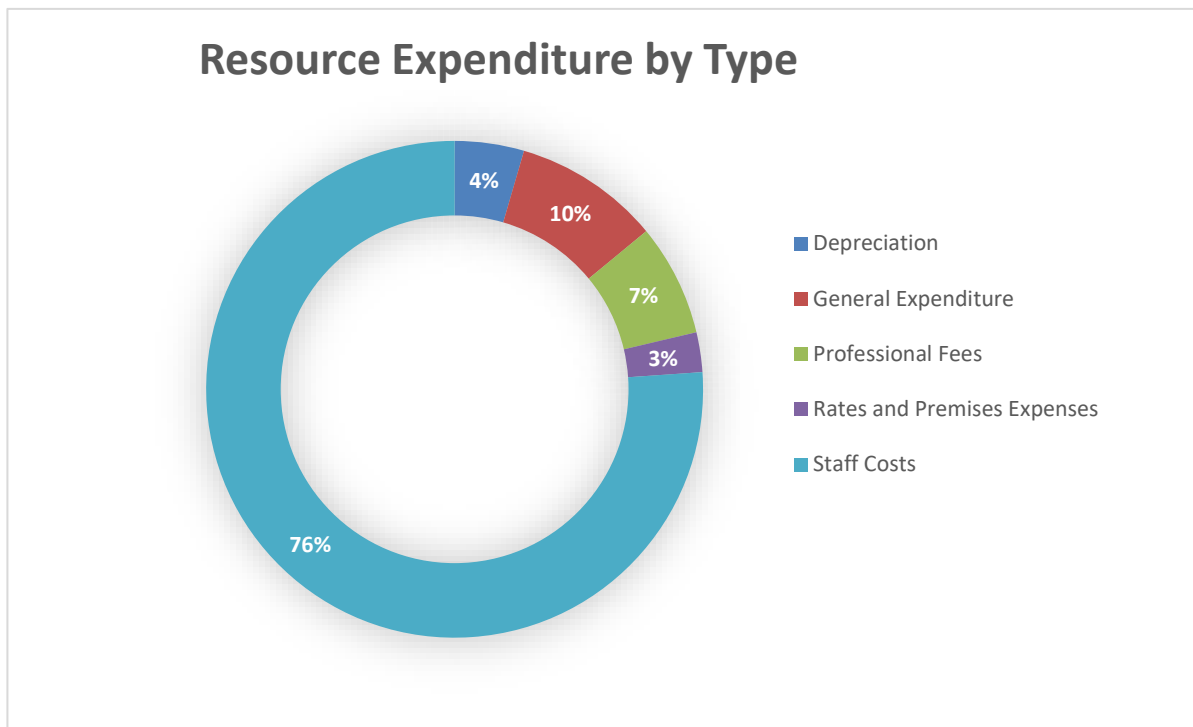
We treat people with respect and empathy and recognise and value individual experience. We are accessible and engage and explain our decision making.

Excellence

We deliver an excellent service, meeting our service standards with high levels of governance and accountability. We have a focus on continuous learning and improvement.

6. OUR FINANCIALS

We have a total annual operating expenditure of approx. £4m, the vast majority of which relates to our staff costs. The breakdown of our resource expenditure for 2023-24 is summarised below:



You can access our latest accounts in our [Annual Report and Accounts 2023-2024](#).

7. JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Title: Policy and Engagement Officer

Reporting to: Senior Policy & Engagement Officer

Grade: Staff Officer

Salary: £34,524 - £35,712 per annum (Under Review)

Location: Belfast

Main purpose of job

The Policy and Engagement Officer will provide support to the Director of Improvement, Engagement and Impact and Senior Policy & Engagement Officer to ensure the development and effective implementation of learning from the broad range of NIPSO investigations. This will include both maladministration investigations and local government standards investigations linked to the Code of Conduct for local Councillors. Duties will include conducting research, policy analysis and the development of outcome and impact measurements. It will also involve understanding case decisions and case thresholds and using these to improve standards across both the Councillor community and public bodies. The post holder will participate in networks established with public bodies, elected representatives, advocacy and support groups and other regulators and oversight bodies to; understand issues with the delivery of public services, ensure the dissemination of learning from NIPSO investigations both maladministration and local government ethical standards to improve public services and standards of conduct and promote a culture of learning from complaints.

Summary of principal duties and responsibilities:

- Support the Director of Improvement, Engagement and Impact in the development and implementation of improvement, impact and learning from complaints in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Ombudsman;
- Establish NIPSO as an authoritative voice on learning lessons from complaints;
- Work with the Director of Improvement, Engagement and Impact and Senior Policy & Engagement Officer to ensure NIPSO uses its complaints investigations as an evidence base to shape NIPSO's contribution to policy, research, standards and broader lessons for change as well as measuring the impact of NIPSO's work;
- Support the Director of Improvement, Engagement and Impact in the development of outcome and impact indicators for NIPSO across the broad range of work to ensure achievement of outcomes;
- Assist in the development of appropriate and sound methodological approaches to research, reports and investigations;
- Assist in the analysis of evidence and identification of trends from NIPSO investigations and decisions to enable NIPSO to contribute to policy development for the improvement of public services and standards;

- Maintain a review of complaints and Code of Conduct decisions in other jurisdictions and feed them in to NIPSO's analysis of evidence and trends;
- Work with the Director of Improvement, Engagement and Impact and the Senior Policy & Engagement Officer in the collation, analysis and publication of key statistics, case digests, thematic reports, toolkits, guidance and other publications which ensure the lessons of NIPSO's work and its impact for learning and improvement across the public sector and in improving standards of conduct is understood and addressed;
- Present the work and findings of the engagement, improvement and impact function to a wide range of audiences;
- Engage with public bodies, political representatives, support and advocacy groups and appropriate networks to ensure the lessons from and impact of NIPSO's work is properly and appropriately shared for the purpose of improving public services, standards of conduct and promoting a culture of learning from complaints;
- Promote NIPSO's engagement strategy to ensure those most disadvantaged and who find it hardest to engage with the complaints process are supported to engage with NIPSO and share their experience;
- Assist in the preparation of reports, presentations, articles and other materials as required by NIPSO to support the complaints standards function;
- Cooperate with colleagues across NIPSO to ensure the most efficient use of resources to achieve strategic, business and operational objectives;
- Contribute to the annual business and operational plan on engagement, improvement and impact; and
- Any other duties commensurate with the main purpose of the role.

General Responsibilities & Duties

- Adhere to the NIPSO values of fairness, impartiality, openness, respect and integrity;
- Adhere to and promote the Office policies on Equality of Opportunity and Dignity at Work, demonstrating a commitment to the principles of equality, fairness and diversity in all aspects of work;
- Have due regard for your own safety and that of others, behaving appropriately at all times and reporting all accidents no matter how minor;
- Take responsibility for the development of own skills and knowledge through proactive engagement in the internal performance review processes; and
- Undertake ad-hoc, cross-functional project work supporting the development of the Office and service provision as reasonably requested by your line manager.

This job description is subject to review and amendment as the demands of the role and the organisation evolves. Therefore, the postholder will be required to be flexible and adaptable and aware that they may be asked to perform tasks, duties and responsibilities which are not specifically detailed in the job description, but which are commensurate with the role.

8. PERSON SPECIFICATION

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA

Applicants must, as at the closing date for receipt of applications, be able to demonstrate by providing personal and specific examples on their application form that they have:

- Educated to degree level (or equivalent) *(AF)*;
- Excellent people and relationship management skills and ability to operate in an environment with a complex set of stakeholders *(I)*;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills and experience of translating complex information into easily accessible reports, consultation responses and other materials *(AF, I)*;
- Demonstrable experience in the use of IT Software and a range of Microsoft Office tools to include Excel *(P, I)*;
- Understanding of the complex policy environment within which NIPSO sits and experience of contributing to influencing policy *(AF, I)*;
- Research skills and understanding of key research methodologies *(I)*;
- Experience of engaging with a broad range of stakeholders to influence change *(AF, P, I)*.
- Experience of engagement with politicians *(AF, I)*.

DESIRABLE CRITERIA

In addition to the above essential criteria, NIPSO reserves the right to only shortlist those candidates who can also demonstrate, by providing personal and specific examples on the application form that they have:

- Knowledge of Outcomes Based Accountability *(AF)*;
- Experience of influencing political representatives and senior decision makers on a wide range of policy issues *(AF, I)*;
- Experience of contributing to the development and use of outcomes and impact indicators *(AF, P, I)*.

SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Applicants must be able to demonstrate evidence of the following skills, competencies and attributes which will be tested at interview and through a presentation task:

- Oral and Written Communication
- Collaborative Working
- Analytical and Problem Solving
- Continuous Improvement

9. WORKING FOR US

Remuneration

The salary for this post is currently equivalent to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Staff Officer which is £34,524 - £35,712 per annum.

Location

The role will be based at NIPSO, Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN.

Working Arrangements

We operate hybrid working arrangements i.e. a mix of working from home and from the office which offers employees additional workstyle choices.

Candidates should note that whilst we do have a flexible approach, the operational requirements are likely to require office based working a minimum of 2 days per week.

Successful applicants also have the opportunity to request Flexible Working from the 1st day of their employment. Management will give full consideration to the flexible working request. However, no employee can be guaranteed flexible working and the needs of the organisation will take priority

Working Hours

The post is fixed term for 18 months, with potential for extension, full-time (37 hours per week), subject to a probationary period of 9 months.

Pension

The successful candidate will be eligible to join the NICS Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.

Annual Leave

Annual leave entitlement is 25 days annual leave, plus 12 days public holidays.

Other benefits

We have a generous occupational sick pay and maternity, paternity and adoption leave/pay arrangements, as well as a suite of work-life balance policies. Employees also have access to an Employee Assistance Programme.

We provide support for ongoing training and provide development opportunities for all staff. In 2022 we implemented a coaching framework to ensure all employees of NIPSO receive regular support and guidance from their line manager.

10. SELECTION PROCESS

Applications for the post can be made on GetGotJobs Portal through the following link:
<https://nipso.getgotjobs.co.uk/registerJob/0c4e5220-8256-2829-247b-8d9f3cfad7fd>

Completed application and monitoring forms are to be completed no later than **12 noon on 10th February 2025**

Applicants who meet the shortlisting criteria will be invited to participate in a selection and assessment process.

In the event of a high volume of applications NIPSO reserves the right to apply additional criteria in order to achieve a manageable shortlist of applicants.

Reasonable Adjustments

NIPSO are committed to ensuring equal access to employment opportunities for all individuals. Applications from disabled applicants are welcome. If you require any reasonable adjustments at any stage of the recruitment and selection process, please contact us on 0800 34 34 24 or email monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk and we will work with you to find an accessible method for you to submit your application.

Guidance notes for completing your application form

NIPSO is committed to providing equality of opportunity for all job applicants. The information you supply on this application form will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be used solely for assessing your suitability for the post.

A candidate found to have knowingly given false information, or to have wilfully suppressed any material fact will be liable to disqualification from the process, or if appointed, to dismissal. All appointments are made on merit and in accordance with our Recruitment and Selection Policy.

Any canvassing of officers directly or indirectly in connection with an appointment will automatically disqualify the candidate.

Applications will only be accepted on the specific NIPSO application form. Incomplete application forms will not be considered. CVs, letters or any other supplementary material will not be accepted in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms and will not be made available to the shortlisting or interview panel.

Please also note:

- Applications which are received after the closing date or time will not be accepted.
- It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the completed form, together with the completed Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form, is returned by the closing date for applications.

Qualifications

You will be asked to provide original qualification certificates (or, where you have mislaid your original certificates, a certified statement of results from the relevant awarding body) and proof of memberships etc. that are relevant to the post applied for before any offer of employment can be made.

If you believe that your qualification is equivalent to the one required, you must provide specific evidence to demonstrate its equivalency in comparison to the qualification that was specifically detailed in the person specification.

If you possess any professional qualifications, please include the full details and include the date of the award.

If you have membership of a professional body please include the name of the body or organisation, the type of membership you hold (e.g., student, associate, fellow etc.), the date when this grade of membership was obtained and the expiry date (if any). If the membership has lapsed, please state this.

Experience

It is necessary to state your exact dates and periods of employment as at the application closing date (month/year) because this is calculated to the nearest month for shortlisting purposes. The shortlisting panel will only consider the information asked for in each separate box on the application.

You will be required to clearly demonstrate, by giving personal and specific details on your application form, how you meet the experience detailed in the person specification in the relevant box. If you do not supply sufficient information on your application form to clearly demonstrate that you meet the criteria, you will not be shortlisted.

Conflicts of Interest

Given the breadth of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction (namely her roles in investigating complaints about all public service providers in Northern Ireland and in investigating and adjudicating on alleged breaches of the NI Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors), it is important that any actual or perceived conflicts of interest are declared.

On successful appointment, a pre-employment check will be to ask to consider and declare whether or not you have any actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Any interests that would impact your ability to carry out the role independently may result in not being able to progress your offer of employment.

For further assistance you may wish to consult the Northern Ireland Audit Office good practice guide on conflicts of interest.

Selection and Assessment Process

Shortlisting will take place during **week commencing 10th February 2025**. Candidates who demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria and if required, the desirable criteria, will be invited to attend a competency-based interview.

Interviews, including a presentation, are envisaged to take place during **week commencing 24th February 2025**. Further details of the process will be provided to candidates invited to interview.

A reserve list of candidates may be held for a period of twelve months and may be activated on a merit basis if a vacancy arises within that period.

Principles of the Appointment

NIPSO is committed to providing and promoting equality of opportunity and to the principle of recruiting on the basis of merit only. We welcome applications from all suitably qualified candidates regardless of their gender, including gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, having or not having dependants, pregnancy and maternity, religious beliefs, political opinion, race, ethnic origin, colour or nationality, sexual orientation, disability, age, Trade Union membership or non- membership or criminal records.

All NIPSO offers of employment are conditional and subject to successful pre-employment checks and the successful applicant will be required to:

- provide documentation to confirm their identity and their right to work in the UK;
- provide documentation to verify information already provided on the application form, e.g. qualifications, professional registration, driving licence, etc.;
- provide a basic AccessNI Check, which the successful candidate must obtain and the cost of which will be reimbursed upon appointment;
- provide satisfactory references, one of which must be from the candidate's current or most recent employer.
- provide a declaration on whether or not you have any actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

Further Information

If you have any further queries regarding the recruitment and selection process, then please contact the Monitoring Officer (monitoringofficer@nipso.org.uk)