

# April 2025 SMT Minutes

## MEETING: Monday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2025, Progressive House

### In Attendance:

Margaret Kelly – Ombudsman; MK  
 Sean Martin – Deputy Ombudsman; SM  
 Julie Healy - Head of Improvement, Engagement & Impact, JH  
 Corinne Nelson – Director of Investigations, CN  
 Sinead Sargent – Director of Investigations, SSt  
 Kirsty McCool – Director of Governance and Support Services KM  
 Andrew Ruston – Head of Communications, AR  
 Sarah Sherry – Secretariat; SS

Agenda Item	Minutes
1.	<b>Apologies and Conflicts of Interest</b>  There were no apologies.  MK invited those present to register any actual or perceived conflicts of interest relevant to the agenda. No conflicts were noted.
2.	<b>Minutes of the last meeting</b>  The minutes from 12 <sup>th</sup> March 25 were agreed as a true and accurate record.
3.	<b>Outstanding Actions</b>  <i>Retention/Disposal schedule</i> – PRONI had suggested changes to the Retention Schedule late last year. AR has a new draft version to be sent to PRONI  <i>Suite of reports</i> – Both groups have meeting scheduled.  <i>People Strategy</i> - feedback received from staff.  <i>CARE Review</i> – KM to collate feedback from SMT.  <i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy</i> – Policy shared with EDI group – awaiting feedback.  <i>OA Conference</i> – expression of interest email to go to all staff.
4	<b>24/25 Business Plan</b>  The Business Plan will be circulated to SMT for final amendments and issue.

5	<p><b>NIPSO Risk Register</b></p> <p>There were no significant changes to the key risks. SMT to review individual risk tabs.</p>
6	<p><b>Corporate Policy Database</b></p> <p><i>Risk Appetite Statement</i> – to be circulated to SMT.</p> <p><i>Business Continuity Plan</i> –to be circulated.</p> <p>Heads Together is currently exploring the creation of a <i>Family Friendly Policy</i>. This aims to consolidate the Adoption Leave Policy, Shared Parental Leave Policy, Ordinary Parental Leave Policy, Maternity Leave Policy, and Paternity Leave Policy into a single, comprehensive document.</p> <p>The <i>Hybrid Policy</i> is scheduled for review in September 2025, and more detailed discussions will take place in advance of that date. MK emphasized the importance of staff engagement through team discussions, which will be directed by the team Directors.</p> <p><i>Service Standards Policy</i> – for consideration at September 25.</p>
7	<p><b>Quarterly Audit Recommendations</b></p> <p>KM reported that recommendation 71 – the need for an internal procedures document setting out key roles and responsibilities in CS – has been completed. All recommendations due in April 25 will have been completed ahead of the ARC meeting.</p>
8	<p><b>Communications Update</b></p> <p><i>Complaint Subject Descriptors</i> – a revised list of subject descriptors has been uploaded to WordPro. Guidance on their use will be given at scheduled team meetings by AR.</p> <p><i>Website</i> – The complaints standards videos went live today. AR will publicise on social media. SST was congratulated on her team's work getting the videos completed.</p> <p><i>Investigation Reports</i> - 69 reports have been published to date during 24-25. Agreed AR would collate list of reasons for decision to not publish.</p> <p><i>Media Activity</i> – MK provided input for an item by the BBC on 10 years since the reorganization of local government in NI.</p> <p><i>Ombudsman and Commissioner Report</i> to be completed by early September 2025.</p>
9	<p><b>OI and Improvement, Engagement, and Impact Update</b></p> <p><b><u>Own Initiative Update</u></b></p> <p><i>Housing OI</i> –response received and PC is drafting a response– A meeting was requested to discuss scope and methodology.</p> <p><i>Overview Reports</i> – Lost in Translation report was launched in March 25. JH to put a pack together of appropriate literature which MK can share with the Welsh Senedd.</p> <p><b><u>Improvement, Engagement, and Impact Update</u></b></p>

	<p><i>Case Digest</i> –Women’s Health Digest has been launched and sent to everyone on the IEI Engagement Register/MLAs and relevant health bodies. Digest on investigations involving Sepsis almost completed.</p> <p><i>Assembly Engagement</i> – Joint evidence session with NIAO at Education Committee confirmed for 21<sup>st</sup> May. Request sent to Health Minister for a meeting with an invitation to the launch of the Health sector MCHP on 1<sup>st</sup> July.</p> <p><i>Seeking Safety Conference</i> – received positive feedback from attendees. MK and JH will meet to discuss how to advance the findings of the conference. Consider writing to the TEO Committee as well as to the First and Deputy First Ministers to share insights and propose next steps.</p> <p><i>Recruitment</i> – New P + E Officer to start by the middle of April.</p>
10	<p><b>Finance and Corporate Services Update</b></p> <p>KM advised on NIPSO’s latest projection.</p> <p><i>Prompt Payment</i> – for 24-25 was 88.5% of invoices paid within 10 days and 99.8% within 30 days.</p> <p><i>External Audit</i> – ongoing with accounts due to NIAO on 6<sup>th</sup> May. KM has started work on the Annual Report and Accounts. KM to circulate the Annual Report to SMT to update the text.</p> <p><i>IT Reporting</i> – SM expressed his thanks for the reports tabled. KM would like SMT to share any feedback with her.</p> <p><i>Pay and Grading</i> – The revised proposal was submitted to NIPSA and consultation is ongoing.</p> <p><i>Recruitment</i> - Senior Casework Officer, Policy and Engagement Officer and IOs recruitment has been completed. Legal Officer to be timetabled and Corporate Services Officer to be advertised in April 25.</p>
11	<p><b><i>Complaints Standards and ASSIST Update</i></b></p> <p><b><u>Assist</u></b></p> <p><i>Complaints received: 1333. An additional 334 have been re-presented, 25.6 new complaints per week. This represents a 14% annual increase.</i></p> <p><i>Stage 1 - Performance 96%</i> <i>Stage 2 - Performance is 80%</i></p> <p>The number of decisions at stage 2 is 559. There have been 113 cases that progressed to stage 3.</p> <p><i>Resources</i> – Permanent Senior Casework Officer and Investigating Officers have been appointed.</p> <p><i>Call recording</i> – ‘Storm’ set up has been completed. Training took place on 26<sup>th</sup> March and 2<sup>nd</sup> April.</p>

	<p><i>Housing Executive</i> - provided an update on progress against their complaint handling action plan.</p> <p><b><u>Complaints Standards</u></b></p> <p><i>LG Sector</i> – the first set of annual complaints data for publication by the LG sector is due in the coming months.</p> <p><i>Health Sector</i> – Next Strategic and Operational Network meetings are 2<sup>nd</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> April 2025 respectively.</p> <p><i>Bite Sized Videos</i> - Organisations are being encouraged to place these resources on their learning management systems.</p>
12	<p><b><i>MAL and LGES Update</i></b></p> <p><b><u>Investigations</u></b></p> <p><i>KPI 3 performance 91% (target 70%)</i></p> <p><i>Cases closed at Investigations – 116</i></p> <p><b><u>LGES Update</u></b></p> <p><i>Complaints Received – 36</i> <i>19 progressed for Investigation.</i></p> <p><i>Adjudications – 4 cases presently at Adjudication stage</i></p> <p><i>Training – Work is ongoing on the e-learning modules for Councillors about the use of social media and managing Conflicts of Interest</i></p>
14	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>MK would like to officially express her gratitude to every staff member for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. Despite the pressures faced, their ability to produce quality work has been commendable. She requested that her thanks be communicated to each team member to acknowledge their efforts.</p>
15	<p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b> – Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May at 2pm, Progressive House. Papers are due by Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May at Noon.</p>