



Northern Ireland
Public Services
Ombudsman

Invitation to Tender for
Professional Services to develop a Communications Strategy

January 2026

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SECTION A – INTRODUCTION

A1. Overview

1.1 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) seeks to procure the service of an experience communications professional to review NIPSO's current approach and to develop a comprehensive Communications Strategy.

1.2 NIPSO was created on the 1 April 2026 and will be in existence for 10 years on the 1 April 2026. NIPSO wish to develop a plan including a range of events to mark 10 years of NIPSO and to ensure that people are aware of their right to complaint about the delivery of public services and recourse to NIPSO.

A2. Background

2.1 At NIPSO we investigate unresolved complaints about public bodies in Northern Ireland. We do this without involving the courts. In our investigations we check to see if a public body acted properly or whether someone was treated unfairly. When things go wrong we suggest what can be done to put things right.

2.2 We can also investigate where we think there might be systemic service failures, even if we haven't received a complaint. We call these our 'Own initiative' investigations. To carry out one of these investigations we have to think that it would be in the public interest; would help improve public services and is the best and most proportionate use of investigative resources.

2.3 Our work to create common complaints handling standards by public bodies is also aimed at improving public services. We help public bodies in Northern Ireland deal with complaints quickly and more effectively.

2.4 We also carry out two other important functions:

- As the Local Government Commissioner for Standards we look at allegations that councillors may have breached the Local Government Code of Conduct.
- As the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman we investigate complaints from applicants for judicial appointments of alleged maladministration by the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (the Commission) or by Committees of the Commission.

2.5 The first Ombudsman's office in Northern Ireland was created in 1969, but the legislation which currently informs our role is the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. NIPSO employs approximately 60 staff and has a budget of approximately £5.15 million.

2.6 Our organisation is committed to fostering a culture that reflects our vision, purpose, values and strategic objectives. Our current [Strategic Plan is available on our website.](#)

2.7 NIPSO wishes to review its Communications Strategy to help guide our communication methods and focus during the time of our strategic plan. We are now seeking to appoint a supplier to help us develop a suitable strategy and annual plan for 2026/27.

2.8 We also wish to acknowledge and publicise NIPSO's 10 year anniversary with a series of events to help support awareness of the office, its work and the impact for the public, which we would like to appoint a supplier to develop a calendar of events.

SECTION B – SCOPE OF REQUIREMENTS

B1. Objectives

The successful supplier will develop and provide a written Communications Strategy document, an Implementation Plan, an annual communications plan for 2026/27 and an Anniversary Event Plan.

B2. Detailed Requirements

B2.1 Mandatory Requirements

- A detailed understanding of NIPSO's work, including that of its Local Government Commissioner for Standards function.
- Review NIPSO's Communication Strategy and existing communications activities through discussions with senior management.
- Conduct stakeholder analysis.
- Develop key messages aligned with organisational priorities.
- Recommend communication channels (digital, print, social media).
- Create an implementation plan with timelines and responsibilities.
- Provide evaluation measures for effectiveness.
- Create an annual communications plan for 2026/27
- Develop an Event Plan for a year of activities to celebrate the organisation's 10-year anniversary, including:
 - A calendar of proposed events and activities.
 - Recommendations for themes, formats and engagement approaches.
 - Resource and budget considerations.
- Presentation to senior leadership (face to face in NIPSO office)

B2.2 Delivery / Completion Date

It is hoped that this will take between 6-8 weeks and will be delivered by March 2026.

B2.3 Delivery Location

The service can be provided remotely, with optional face to face engagement in NIPSO's offices in Belfast.

SECTION C – INSTRUCTIONS TO TENDERERS

C1. Submission Format

Tender submissions must be made in PDF or word. Submissions must include:

- Understanding of the requirement
- Proposed methodology
- Project plan and milestones
- Risk management approach
- Quality assurance approach
- Team structure and relevant experience
- Case studies
- Price breakdown (fixed price required)

C2. Procurement Timeline

The estimated procurement timeline is:

- ITT issued: **w/c 12th January**
- Tender submissions due: **12 Noon 9th February**
- Evaluation: **w/c 9th February**
- Award decision: **w/c 9th February**
- Contract start: **w/c 16th February**
- Project completion: **Expected within 6-8 weeks**

C3. Evaluation & Scoring

3.1 SCORING SCALE

To ensure consistency and equity in approach the evaluation panel will assign scores to qualitative assessment criteria using the scoring key below:

| Score | Indicator |
|--------------|---|
| 0 | Failed to address the criterion. |
| 1 | Poor proposal to address the criterion. |
| 2 | Limited proposal to address the criterion. |
| 3 | Acceptable proposal to address the criterion. |
| 4 | Good proposal to address the criterion. |
| 5 | Excellent proposal to address the criterion. |

3.2 Qualitative Assessment Criteria

| | Criteria | Weighting |
|--------------|---|------------------|
| AC1 | Understanding of Ombudsman requirements Tenderers should provide details of their understanding of the requirements for a Communications Strategy for an Ombudsman Office. | 10% |
| AC2 | Proposed Methodology and Approach Tenderers should provide details of the proposed methodology and approach to developing the strategy including engagement approach, earliest start date and expected time frame for the delivery of the assignment. This section should also include a project plan detailing the activities to be progressed and anticipated timescales for the completion of each with specific reference to the requirements set out in B2. | 40% |
| AC3 | Company Experience & Competence The tenderer shall supply evidence of having an in-depth knowledge and demonstrable experience in strategic communications. | 20% |
| Total | | 70% |

3.5 Threshold Score

If tenderers score **2, 1 or 0** in any of the qualitative criteria then it shall be deemed that they have failed to meet the specification and their tender will be eliminated from the competition.

3.3 Price Assessment Criteria

| | Criteria | Score |
|--------------|--|--------------|
| AC4 | Price A breakdown of daily costs per project team member and estimated time to complete the project. Costs must be stated exclusive of VAT. Anticipated expenses should be itemised. | 30% |
| Total | | 30% |

3.4 How scores will be attributed for Price

For those tenders passing the qualitative assessment, the following formula will be used to evaluate price.

1. Lowest **price** tendered will be awarded the maximum score available **30**.
2. To calculate the score for the remaining price, the following formula will be applied.
The lowest tendered price divided by the tenderers price multiplied by **30**.

Tenderers should note that NIPSO is not obliged to accept the lowest, or any, tender.

C4. Price and Payment

- The Contract Price is fixed unless expressly stated otherwise.
- Payment will be made within 30 days, in line with NI public-sector prompt-payment policy.

C5. Contact Details

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