

# October 2025 SMT Minutes

## MEETING: Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 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, SS  
 Andrew Ruston – Head of Communications, AR  
 Sarah Sherry – Secretariat; SS

Michael McClean – Finance and Corporate Manager - MMcC

Agenda Item	Minutes
1.	<b>Apologies and Conflicts of Interest</b>  Apologies received from Kirsty McCool – Director of Governance and Support Services  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 9 <sup>th</sup> September 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record.
4	<b>Hybrid Working Policy Review</b>  MK expressed thanks to all for providing staff feedback.  The staff feedback provided topics of conversation and further work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CF to review public sector hybrid policies.</li> <li>• Draft Policy to be updated.</li> <li>• New Quarterly Staff Newsletter</li> </ul>
5	<b>CARE Discussion</b>  A brief discussion took place regarding CARE. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CARE form to be revised by KM on her return.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarterly check ins agreed, with paperwork, produced every 6 months (Q1 and Q3).</li> <li>SMT to have a 6 monthly CARE review.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Family Friendly Policy</b></p> <p>Agreement was made to have a combined Family Friendly Policy.</p> <p>CF to highlight the changes that she made to the policy and circulate the updated version to SMT for review.</p> <p><i>Sick Pay</i> –The current sickness policy will be reviewed, and a proposal to be drafted and circulated to SMT for consideration and approval.</p>
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Code of Conduct and Conflicts of Interest</b></p> <p><i>Draft Conflicts of Interest Policy</i> – Public and Political Appointments - wording to be changed. Subject to formatting SMT is content to approve.</p> <p><i>Draft Code of Conduct</i> – 13.2 and 9.1 – wording to be amended.</p>
<b>8</b>	<p><b>Unacceptable Behaviour of 3<sup>rd</sup> Parties Management Policy</b></p> <p>SM advised that work is ongoing on a commissioned piece work to update this policy.</p> <p>However, an in-date version is required in the interim. SS to share the final version for SMT approval.</p>
<b>9</b>	<p><b>Standards of Service Complaints Policy</b></p> <p>SM stated that the policy has been updated to include a clearer, staged process for handling concerns. The revised structure introduces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Stage 1 – Validation and Resolution:</b> Initial review and resolution by the team manager within <b>5 working days</b>.</li> <li><b>Stage 2 – Investigation:</b> A formal investigation process to be completed within <b>20 working days</b>.</li> <li><b>Stage 3 – Independent Verification:</b> If the outcome is disputed, a verification will be conducted by a manager not previously involved, prior to escalation to an independent reviewer.</li> </ul> <p>SMT approved the updated policy, subject to a final read-through by SM.</p>
<b>10</b>	<p><b>25/26 Business Plan</b></p> <p>SS to circulate the plan for final amendment before Friday.</p>
<b>11</b>	<p><b>NIPSO Risk Register</b></p> <p>SM to review document and consider SMT comments.</p>
<b>13</b>	<p><b>Quarterly Audit Recommendations</b></p> <p>SM advised that there have been 2 internal audits – <i>Health and Safety and Follow up</i>.</p> <p><b>Health and Safety</b> – there were 3 Priority 3 recommendations.</p>

	<p><b>Follow Up</b> – there was 1 priority 3 recommendation which has not been completed relating to completion of business continuity training which is scheduled for 6<sup>th</sup> November 25.</p>
14	<p><b>Communications Update</b></p> <p><i>Website</i> – AR reported that additional protection has been added to the site.</p> <p><i>Commissioner for Standards</i> – AR is scheduled to deliver a presentation to councillors at Ards and North Down Borough Council at the end of October.</p>
15	<p><b>Finance and Corporate Services Update</b></p> <p>MMcC joined the meeting at 11.40</p> <p>He provided an update on the overall current year projected spend for NIPSO including proposed spend on forthcoming recruitment and the implications of the changed depreciation indices. SMT to ensure all updated spend is provided to MMCL.</p> <p><i>Staff Changes</i> – MMcC received a verbal update on staffing allowing budget adjustments.</p> <p><i>Workpro Changes</i> – All ticket requests for changes to be approved by SM.</p> <p>MMcC left the meeting at 12.25</p> <p><i>Power BI</i> – SM and SS to agree on reports to be presented</p>
16	<p><b>OI and Improvement, Engagement, and Impact Update</b></p> <p><b><u>Complainant Feedback 24-25</u></b></p> <p>JH advised that the complainant feedback received is similar to last year. 1472 complaint feedback surveys were issued and 205 responses returned, giving a final response rate of 14%.</p> <p>MK would like to share the feedback document at the November Staff Briefing.</p> <p>Public Awareness and Customer Satisfaction Survey to be completed.</p> <p><b><u>Improvement, Engagement, and Impact Update</u></b></p> <p><i>EDI and Complainant Feedback</i> – EDI – 22% and LGES – 25%</p> <p><i>Complaints Standards</i> – The design of short guides have been finalised –copies to be printed for engagement sessions.</p>
17	<p><b>Complaints Standards and ASSIST Update</b></p> <p><b><u>Assist</u></b></p> <p><i>Complaints received: 847, which is an 33% increase on the previous year.</i></p>

	<p>The number of decisions at stage 2 is 309.</p> <p>STORM – System continues to be well received by staff. An enhancement is underway to allow staff access to their own calls for note-taking.</p> <p>JH and SSt are catching up regarding Programme of Complaints Standards Engagement.</p>
18	<p><b><i>MAL and LGES Update</i></b></p> <p><b><u>Investigations</u></b></p> <p><i>KPI 3 performance 86% (target 70%)</i></p> <p><b><u>LGES Update</u></b></p> <p><i>Allegations Received – 54</i></p> <p><i>KPI4 – 100% - 43/43</i>  <i>KPI 5 – 100%- 9/9</i></p> <p><i>Adjudications – 3 cases presently at Adjudication stage.</i></p>
19	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>SM advised that he has spoken to EDG on codifying advice to date on the NIPSO Act.</p> <p><i>Investigation Accreditation Training</i> – CF is exploring options for staff to undertake selected modules.</p> <p><i>Learning Disability Awareness Training</i> – CF to provide further information and SMT to agree via email.</p> <p><i>Staff Directory</i> – to be updated by role rather than salary scale.</p> <p><i>Procurement – Design and Print Tender</i> – AR advised that current contract has expired. JH to review recent spend figures.</p>
20	<p><b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b> – Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November at 10 am, Progressive House. Papers are due by Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November 25 at Noon.</p>