

STANDARDS OF SERVICE COMPLAINTS POLICY

**Key information for making a complaint
about the Utility Regulator**

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1. Policy summary

The Utility Regulator is committed to providing high quality customer services and we value complaints as a useful tool to help us improve our services. If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us.

This document provides consumers with clear and straight forward information on our complaints handling procedure which follows the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman Office (NIPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP).

We are committed to providing accessible and inclusive customer service. This policy is available in alternative formats upon request.

If you require a reasonable adjustment to make a complaint - for example the use of a different communication method, or access support - please contact us.

To speak to someone about your complaint, please call 028 9031 1575 and ask to speak to the Complaints Officer.

Alternatively, you can email us at: info@uregni.gov.uk or write to us at:

The Complaints Officer

Utility Regulator

Millennium House

Belfast

BT1 6ED

We will work with you to ensure your needs are met and that your concerns are addressed fairly and appropriately.

About the Utility Regulator

- 1.1 The Utility Regulator is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries, to promote the short and long-term interests of consumers.
- 1.2 We make sure that the energy and water utility industries in Northern Ireland are regulated and developed within ministerial policy as set out in our statutory duties.
- 1.3 We are governed by a Board and are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly through financial and annual reporting obligations.

Policy aims

- 1.4 This policy aims to explain:
 - a) What a standards of service complaint is;
 - b) The types of complaint which are covered by the policy, and also the types of complaint which are not;
 - c) Who can raise a complaint;
 - d) How complaints can be made;
 - e) The process of how we manage standards of service complaints; and
 - f) How we report on these complaints, outcomes and learning/service improvements.

What is a standards of service complaint?

- 1.5 We regard a complaint as "a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction by any individual, organisation, licenced company, stakeholder, or member of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf..

2. What can I complain about?

You can complain about things like:

- Failure to provide a service, or the provision of an inadequate standard of service;
- Unreasonable delays in the provision of our service;
- How we treated, communicated or interacted with a you;
- Our failure to correctly follow our internal processes; or
- Our failure to follow the appropriate legal or administrative process.

2.1 There are some concerns which we will not consider under this policy. These include:

- Complaints relating to the service provided by your energy or water company. In those circumstances please refer to the procedure for dealing with Appeals Complaints and Disputes which you will find in the customer information section of our website - **Making a complaint about my energy supplier | Utility Regulator;**
- The subject matter of concerns which are being, or have been considered under our Enforcement Policy and Procedure - **Utility Regulator Enforcement Procedure 2024;**
- Investigations into previous complaints dealt with under this policy which have now concluded;
- Issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (if you decide to take legal action, you should let us know as the complaint cannot then be considered under this process);
- A request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (UK data protection legislation), and requests for reviews of decisions under these statutory regimes;
- A grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment; and
- A concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as raising a concern).

Data Protection Complaints

- 2.2 Under data protection legislation, individuals have the right to make a complaint to the Utility Regulator if they have concerns about how we have processed their personal data. Complaints can be submitted through our complaints process and will be handled in accordance with our statutory obligations. If an individual remains dissatisfied after receiving our response, they may raise their concerns with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Vexatious complaints

- 2.3 Sometimes customers make vexatious complaints. This means they persist unreasonably with their complaints. This usually relates to those complaints which, because of their frequency and nature of the contact, hinders our ability to provide a quality service.
- 2.4 For example, this could involve making serial complaints about different matters, or continuing to raise the same or similar matters, despite having had a response.
- 2.5 Each complaint must be considered and a decision made as to whether it is genuine or vexatious. If a complaint is considered vexatious, we will notify the complainant of our decision not to consider their complaint and explain the reasons why.
- 2.6 We may also consider whether the unreasonable persistence is a matter which falls within our **Unacceptable Behaviour and Harassment Policy**

3. Who can raise a complaint under this policy?

- 3.1 Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services, or a service contracted or commissioned by us, can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, elected representative, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will normally need their written consent.

4. How long do I have to make a complaint?

4.1 Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the event you want to complain about; or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

4.2 In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

5. How do I make a complaint?

You can submit your complaint in writing (letter or email), by phone or by using the contact us section of our website - **Contact us | Utility Regulator.**

Complaints in writing should be directed to:

The Complaints Officer

Utility Regulator

Millennium House

Belfast

BT1 6ED

Or:

Email: info@uregni.gov.uk

To speak to someone about your complaint please call 028 9031 1575 and ask to speak to the Complaints Officer.

When you submit a complaint, we ask you to follow these guiding principles:

- Provide adequate details of your complaint.
- Set out clearly the cause for dissatisfaction.
- Provide accurate details and supporting correspondence or other relevant supporting evidence.
- If there has been a delay in submitting your complaint explain the cause of that delay.
- Explain what you believe to be a satisfactory outcome.
- Treat our staff with good manners, politeness and civility at all times.
- Accept that we will act fairly and promptly in dealing with your complaint.
- Be reasonable and open minded and listen to reasonable explanations.
- Be realistic. It may not always be possible to achieve the outcome you want.

6. How will we handle your complaint?

We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint and provide contact details. Our complaints procedure has two stages.

Stage 1: Frontline response

We aim to respond to complaints quickly (where possible when you first tell us about the issue). This could mean an on-the-spot apology if something has clearly gone wrong, or immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will give you a decision at Stage 1 in five working days or less (unless there are exceptional circumstances).

If you are not satisfied with the response we give at Stage 1, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to Stage 2. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2 either:

- within six months of the event, you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
- within two months of receiving your Stage 1 response from us (if this is later).

In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a Stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1; and those that clearly require in-depth investigation, and so are handled at this stage following discussion and agreement with you. If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at Stage 1, you can ask us to handle it at Stage 2 instead.

When using Stage 2:

- We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days.
- We will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for.
- We will try to resolve your complaint where we can.

- Where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within 20 working days.
- If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

Our response will advise you as to the outcomes of the investigation and any action that will be taken as a result of the investigation

What if I'm still dissatisfied?

After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) to review it.

NIPSO is an independent organisation that investigates complaints across the public sector. The service provided by NIPSO is free.

NIPSO generally expects complaints to be brought to it within six months from us informing you that the complaints handling procedure is complete, and of your right to refer your complaint to NIPSO. You will need to provide details of your complaint and a copy of our final response.

NIPSO's contact details are:

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

33 Wellington Place

Belfast

BT1 6HN

Telephone: Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Website: **The Office of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman**

If you would like to visit in person, you must make an appointment first.

The freepost address is: FREEPOST NIPSO

If NIPSO cannot investigate your complaint and your complaint requires an alternative route for independent review, NIPSO will tell you and provide you with the relevant contact details.

Please note: NIPSO is not an advocacy or support service. You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint.

7. How do we report outcomes and learning/service improvements?

- 7.1 Complaints brought under this policy will be brought to the Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis. This will include any information on how any learning/ service improvements have been implemented.
- 7.2 Any complaints directed to NIPSO for investigation will be reported within our Annual Report and Accounts.