

Complaints about the Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

The following is a guide for those wishing to complain about the office of the Prisoner Ombudsman.

What does the Prisoner Ombudsman do?

The Prisoner Ombudsman is appointed by the Minister of Justice and investigates complaints from prisoners held in Northern Ireland who remain unhappy with the answer they have received from the Prison Service. The Ombudsman is completely independent of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS).

With effect from 1 September 2005 the remit of the Prisoner Ombudsman was extended to include investigations of deaths in Prison Service Custody.

With effect from 1 February 2010 the remit of the Prisoner Ombudsman was further extended to include investigation of complaints from visitors to prison.

Complaints about the Prisoner Ombudsman

If you have had dealings with the Prisoner Ombudsman, whether through the investigation of your complaint, or the investigation of a death in custody of a family member and you were not happy with the service you received, we want to hear from you. We see every complaint as a potential opportunity to learn and improve our services. We will consider complaints from solicitors acting on behalf of prisoners/families providing they have the authority of the prisoner/family to do so.

How to make a complaint

You can make a complaint verbally or in writing to the Director of Operations who is your **single point of contact** and who will take personal responsibility for ensuring your complaint is dealt with by the most appropriate person, that it is dealt with in a timely manner and that you are updated on the progress of your complaint.

Contact details:

**Director of Operations
Prisoner Ombudsman for NI
Unit 2
Walled Garden
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SH**

Telephone: 028 9052 7771 or Freephone: 0800 7836317

Email: pa@prisonerombudsman.x.gsi.gov.uk

What we will do

There are a number of ways in which we can seek to deal with your complaint:

- **Informal Resolution** – we will always seek to resolve any issue you may have as speedily as possible and we will discuss with you what you were not happy about and what we can do to remedy the situation. We will agree with you the actions that we will take to informally resolve the matter.
- **Formal Complaints Procedure** – if it is not possible or appropriate to resolve the matter informally we will investigate your complaint using our Formal Complaints Procedure.

Formal Complaints Procedure

1. Your complaint will be registered and acknowledged in writing within three days of being received by the Director of Operations.
2. We will assign an appropriate member of staff to investigate your complaint and the investigation will be overseen by the Director of Operations, or the Director of Operations may undertake the investigation themselves.
3. The investigation of your complaint will usually include:
 - A review of all the relevant material.
 - Discussion with you the complainant about the issues of concern and the potential remedies.
 - Discussion with relevant staff within the Office of the Prisoner Ombudsman.
4. At the end of the investigation the Director of Operations will provide you with a response to your complaint. We will aim to do this within 20 working days of receiving your complaint. If there are any delays in the investigation of your complaint you will be informed of this with a further date for a response.
5. If you remain dissatisfied with the response received you have the right to complain to the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman.

Complaints to the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman

The Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) conducts independent and impartial investigations into public services. The NIPSO website www.nipso.org.uk provides information on their jurisdiction and powers.

To make a complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman you should contact them directly, within six months of receiving the final response from the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office. Contact details are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

Opening Hours: 9.00am - 5.00pm, Monday to Friday (excluding Public Holidays)

Telephone: 028 9023 3821 or **Freephone:** 0800 34 34 24

Text Phone: 028 9089 7789

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Freepost: Freepost NIPSO