



# Complaints Policy

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**Alternative Formats**

This documentation can be made available in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, disk, audio tape or in an ethnic-minority language upon request. Requests for alternative formats can be made to the Probation Board using the following contact information:

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## **1. Rationale**

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) values complaints because we believe dealing with complaints effectively can help us to improve our service to the public. PBNI believes that handled well, complaints about our service will give service users and members of the public a form of remedy and possible redress when things go wrong and can also assist us in fulfilling our commitment to 'continuous improvement' and enhance our reputation.

Complaints about our service can provide a real time insight into individual's views and experience of our service and can highlight problems we might otherwise miss.

All complaints received will be dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, subject to the need to disclose information as required by statutory authorities, and/or as a result of any statutory or legal obligations placed on PBNI.

PBNI Complaints Policy and related Procedures take account and incorporate the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's 'Principles of Good Complaint Handling' and 'Complaints Standards Statement of Principles'.

## **2. Aim**

The aim of this policy is to ensure that there is a fair and effective process in place for the receipt, recording, investigating and response to external complaints.

## **3. Objectives**

- a) To ensure there is clear governance arrangements in place which set out roles and responsibilities of staff in relation to complaints.
- b) To ensure PBNI deal with complaints promptly, professionally and sensitively, bearing in mind the needs and individual circumstances of complainants.
- c) To ensure a range of PBNI staff are trained and empowered to act decisively to resolve complaints.
- d) To ensure both the Complainant and the person being complained of are kept up to date and informed of progress and the outcome of the complaints process.
- e) To ensure staff involved in complaints are given support.
- f) To build confidence internally and externally in PBNI's complaints handling process.
- g) To ensure learning from complaints informs service development and improvement.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

### *The Complaints Officer*

The role of the Complaints Officer is to provide advice and guidance to the Decision Officer and Investigating Officer and all parties involved in the complaint and to ensure that the Complaints Policy and Procedures are followed appropriately. The Complaints Officer in conjunction with the Decision officer writes and agrees the Terms of Reference and reads and proofs the investigation report to ensure it complies with the policy and procedures.

### *The Complaints Co-ordinator*

The Complaints Co-ordinator is the first point of contact for Complainants and members of staff who have been complained about. It is their responsibility to provide copies of the policy and procedures to the Complainant and staff members complained of. They are responsible for sending all communication to the Investigating Officer and Decision Officer and keeping a log of all complaints. They are responsible for updating the complaint files and ensuring the Decision Officer and Investigating Officer are reminded of timeframes in the policy and procedures.

### *Decision Officer*

The role of the Decision Officer is to appoint an Investigating Officer, define and agree the Terms of Reference (alongside the Complaints Officer). The Decision Officer receives the Investigation Report and may ask for further information and investigation if the report is unsatisfactory or there is a need for more information. The Decision Officer makes the decision and informs the Complainant and the staff member of the decision by letter. Once the complaint is investigated the Decision Officer should notify HR if the complaint is upheld.

### *Investigating Officer*

The role of the Investigating Officer is to manage the complaint from the point he/she is appointed until the investigation report is complete. They are responsible for all communications from appointment with the Complainant and person complained of. They must interview/ speak with the Complainant and person complained of. They must keep all involved updated on time frames. They must determine are there witnesses they must contact and speak to. They must review all relevant policies, procedures and practice notes. They must keep a note of all meetings. When considering evidence they must use the 'balance of probabilities' as the burden of proof. They must draft an investigation report and submit it to the Decision Officer and Complaints Officer.

## **5. Programmes and Projects**

PBNI Complaints Procedures are in place.

## **6. Resources**

There is a need for training to be carried out for Investigating Officers which may incur a cost.

## **7. Communications and Training**

All Probation staff will be trained on complaints handling through a mandatory e-learning course. There will be specific training provided for all staff who may act as Investigating Officers.

## **8. Monitoring and Evaluation**

This policy will also be kept under review to ensure it is in keeping with current legislation and good practice.

## **9. Review**

This policy will be reviewed four years from the date of approval. Interim reviews may also be prompted by feedback, and or identified changes in practice.

## **10. Linkages**

This Policy links to PBNI Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

## **11. Non compliance**

Breach of the Board's Policy by employees may merit consideration under the Board's Disciplinary Policy.