


Report on	Model Complaints Handling Procedures: Implementation
Date of Meeting	Thurs 5 th October 2023
Reporting Officer	M Canavan, Director of Org. Development, Strategy & Performance P Moffett, Assistant Director of Org. Development, Strategy & Performance
Contact Officer	Arlene McIlwrath, Customer Experience Manager

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	x

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To inform Members of the background to and arrangements to implement the requirements of the Model Complaints Handling Procedures, as published by the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) on complaints management across local government in Northern Ireland. To give consideration to adopting the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP).
1.2	Part 3 of the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 places a responsibility on NIPSO to work with and publish complaints handling procedures for public bodies in Northern Ireland, providing the legislative basis to undertake same.
2.0	Background
2.1	Arising from the Public Services Ombudsman (NI) Act 2016 and subsequent consultation in 2021 on the development of a two stage complaints handling procedure for local government in Northern Ireland, the NI Public Service Organisation (NIPSO) has now developed a Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP). This provides a framework around which Council should receive, manage and monitor complaints.
2.2	The MCHP was published on 1 st July following a period of engagement and consultation with relevant stakeholders including Councils, SoLACE and the LG Staff Commission. The operational timeline, as determined by NIPSO, is as detailed: 
2.3	It should be noted that, similar to other councils, the Council currently has arrangements in place for complaints handling as part of its Customer Service Policy. The MCHP procedure has been introduced by NIPSO to standardise how complaints should be handled across local government bodies with the introduction of a two stage process, rather than three stage processes which has traditionally been the practice of many councils. We as a council have been operating a two stage process since 2017.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>The MCHP provides a governance framework which sets out a two stage complaints procedure. Whilst detailed guidance notes have been provided by NIPSO, Councils are required to develop their own internal systems and processes for the collation of complaints data. The procedures place a statutory duty on Councils to capture and report data on a quarterly basis with the subsequent publication of the information. To comply with the Local Government MCHP, complaints handling is to be in accordance with procedures and guidance as detailed in Parts 1-3 of the MCHP documentation.</p>
3.2	<p>Whilst the Model Complaints Handling Procedure is attached as appendix A to this report the process primarily centres around the two-stage approach, as detailed:</p> <p>Stage One – Frontline Response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to respond to complainants within 5 working days <p>Stage Two – Investigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a more in-depth investigation with an acknowledgement within 3 working days and full response to be provided within 20 working days
3.3	<p>It is anticipated that the majority of cases will be dealt with at Stage One, however, if customers remain dissatisfied they can escalate it to a Stage Two investigation. Should complainants remain dissatisfied after Stage Two when they receive the final response from the Council they may refer the matter to NIPSO for investigation.</p> <p>Preparation and Going Forward</p>
3.4	<p>The relevant officers are working on establishing and embedding procedures across the organisation to meet the requirements of the MCHP. This will be carried out in conjunction with a review of the existing Customer Services Policy which currently encapsulates the Council's current Complaints Standards & Procedures, together with customer service standards. Council officers are engaged in developing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e-learning training and resources for staff • setting and communicating complaints handling arrangements for directorates • Reviewing our website to improve the customer journey around complaints • Customer facing resources on Complaints handling arrangements • Complaints handling organisational guide
3.5	<p>Council officers are working to have the necessary arrangements in place by the implementation date of 1st January 2024. The Organisational Guide and associated documents will be brought before a future committee.</p>
3.6	<p>To support the ongoing implementation of the procedures, Council Officers are engaged in a Best Practice Network with Council colleagues and NIPSO representatives to discuss, monitor and share best practice as the complaints handling process is put into practice.</p> <p>Adopting the Model Complaints Handling Procedure</p>
3.7	<p>Councils are required to ensure their complaints handling procedure is in line with the requirements of Parts 1 to 3 of the model procedure to meet NIPSO's test of compliance. NIPSO has indicated that it recognises the importance of providing scope for councils to</p>

	reflect their own structure, systems and corporate style when adopting the MCHP, allowing flexibility for the Council to adapt this Organisational Guidance as appropriate. It is recommended that the Council adopts the MCHP which officers will then develop its organisational guide and supporting documents from.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: Future consideration of a records management system to capture and record complaints data to meet the statutory reporting to NIPSO.
	Human: Officer time to develop and implement appropriate systems and training.
	Risk Management: Arrangements brought forward will ensure statutory requirements are met in accordance with timelines as determined by NIPSO.
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: Equality considerations will be taken into account throughout the development of arrangements.
	Rural Needs Implications: Rurality implications will be considered and taken into account throughout the development of our arrangements.
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	That Members note the contents of this report, review and comment as necessary and give consideration to adopting the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) to be developed and personalised to Council.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix A - Model Complaints Handling Complaints Handling Procedure