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Public Services
Ombudsman

Complaint Standards Presentation for GPNI 11th December 2025

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About NIPSO

- NIPSO has legal powers to investigate unresolved complaints about public services.
- It provides a free, independent and impartial service for people who remain dissatisfied at the end of a public body's complaints process.

WHO IS THE OMBUDSMAN?

The Northern Ireland Assembly nominated Margaret Kelly as the new Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman in July 2020. Her post is for a single period of seven years (from August 2020).

Margaret is also the Northern Ireland Local Government Commissioner for Standards (NILGCS). She has taken on the additional role of Complaints Standards Authority for public services in Northern Ireland

Margaret has extensive experience in the community and voluntary sector and working with Public Bodies.

WHO CAN I COMPLAIN ABOUT?

- Health & Social Care
- Housing
- Education
- Local Councils
- Central Government

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What can I complain about?

Maladministration or Poor Care & Treatment (HSC complaints)

- Decisions made without proper consideration
- Action or Inaction
- Avoidable delay
- Misleading or inaccurate statements
- Unfairness, prejudice or bias
- Inadequate record keeping
- Failure to follow policy, procedures or the law
- Poor communication and/or complaint handling

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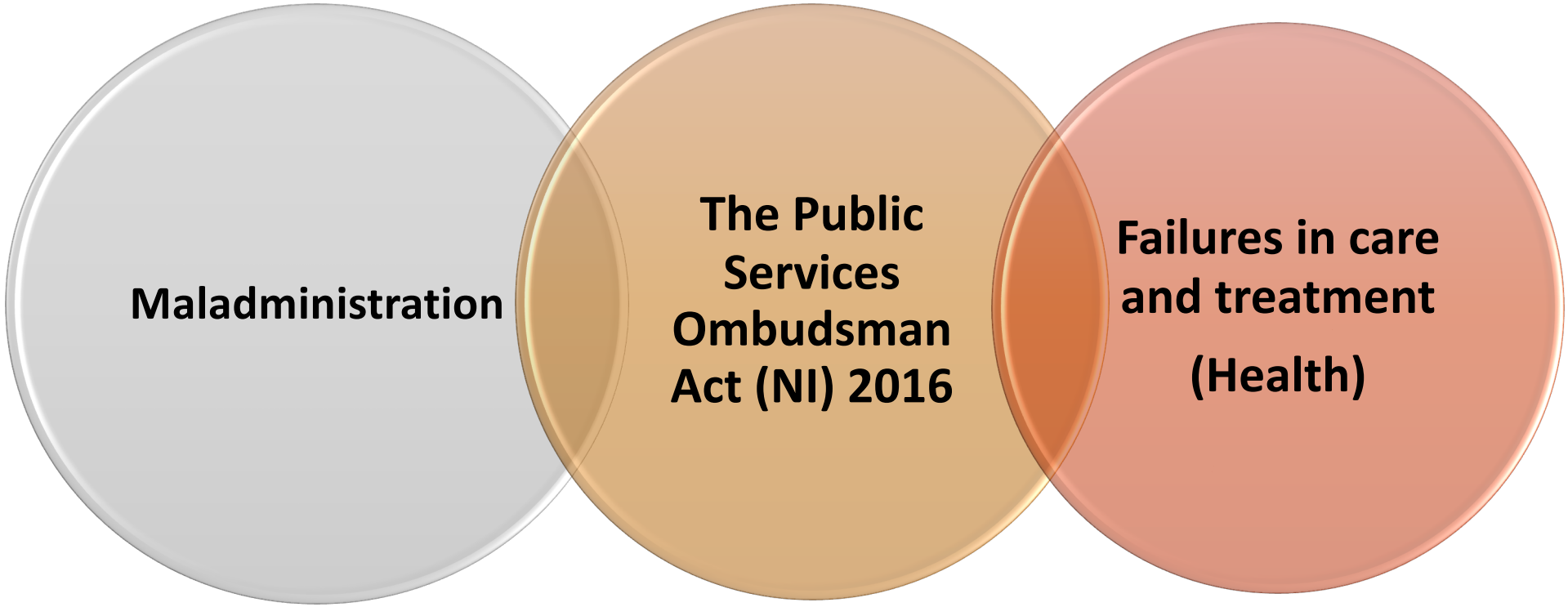
WHAT NIPSO INVESTIGATES



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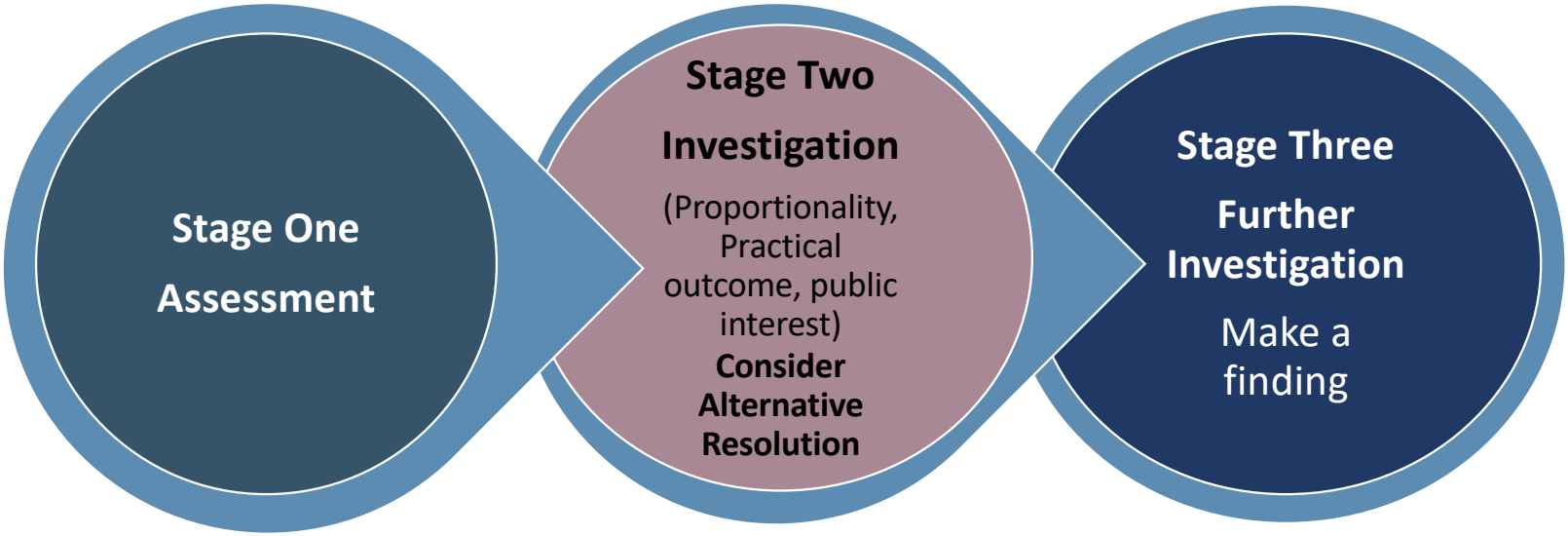
Investigation process – conducted in private



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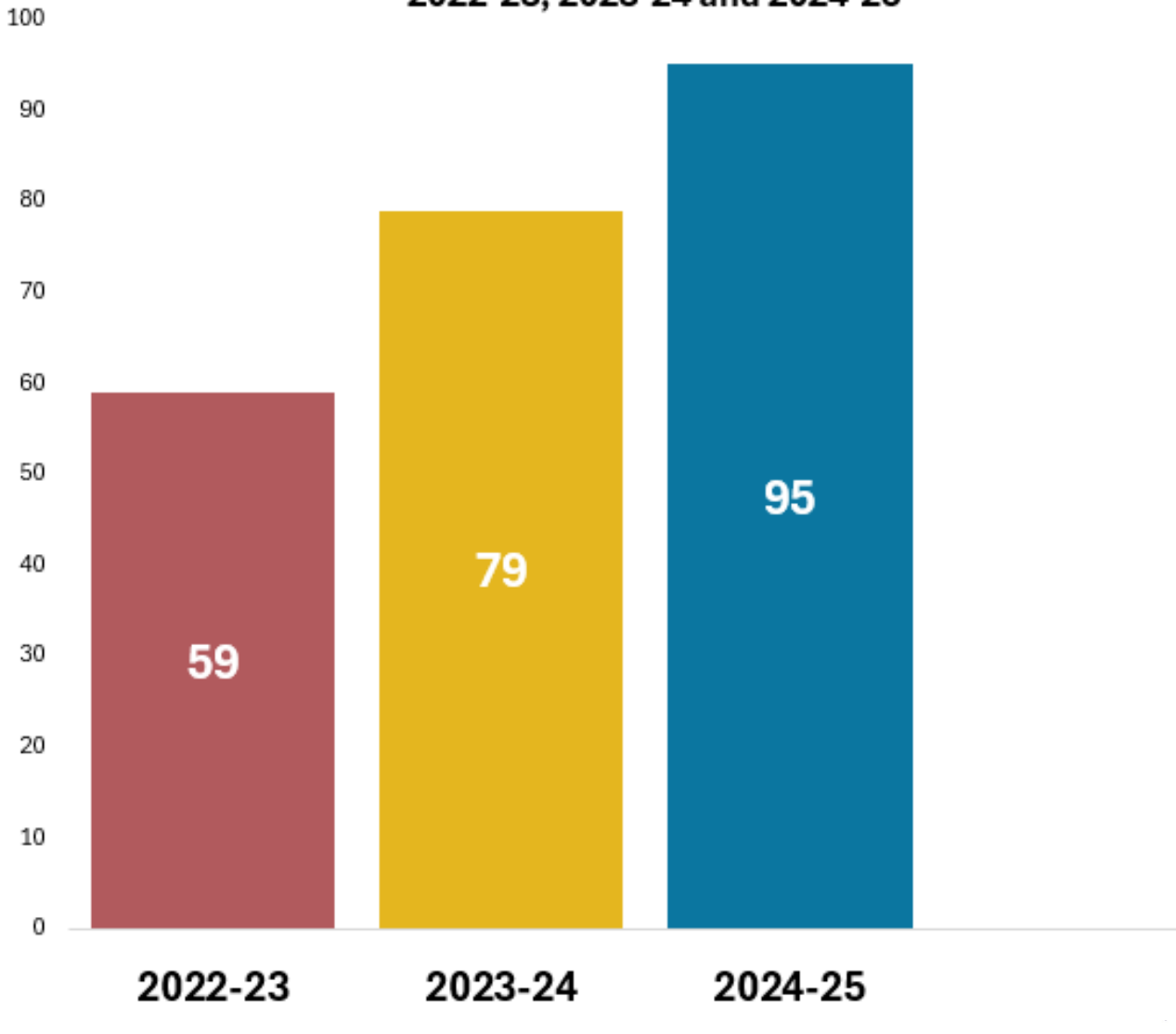
Total number of Complaints to NIPSO about GP practices 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25



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COMPLAINT STATISTICS NORTHERN IRELAND

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
GP complaint stats in NI (Total no of complaints published by SPPG)	195	161	253
No of GP complaints made to Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman	59	79	95

COMPLAINT STATISTICS SCOTLAND

	2022-23	2023-24
GP complaint stats in Scotland (Total GP complaints)	7,137	6,949

	2023-24	2024-25
No of GP complaints made to SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN	336	361

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Complaint Standards -
One set of complaint handling procedures for public bodies and commissioned services

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NIPSO has rolling programme for Complaint Standards – publishing a Model Complaint Handling Procedure (MCHP) with sector specific guidance.

Local Gov MCHP published in July 2023
Health & Social Care MCHP published in July 2025

Background to Complaint Standards

NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (NI) ACT 2016 – LEGISLATIVE BASIS

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE MCHP AND UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES

LEARNING FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

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Complaint Standards is underpinned by the below Statement of Principles

The Statement of Principles

The Statement of Principles are overarching basic principles that public bodies' complaints handling procedures should reflect and comply with. These principles aim to help drive a focus on the early resolution of complaints and promote the use of complaints information for learning and improvement.

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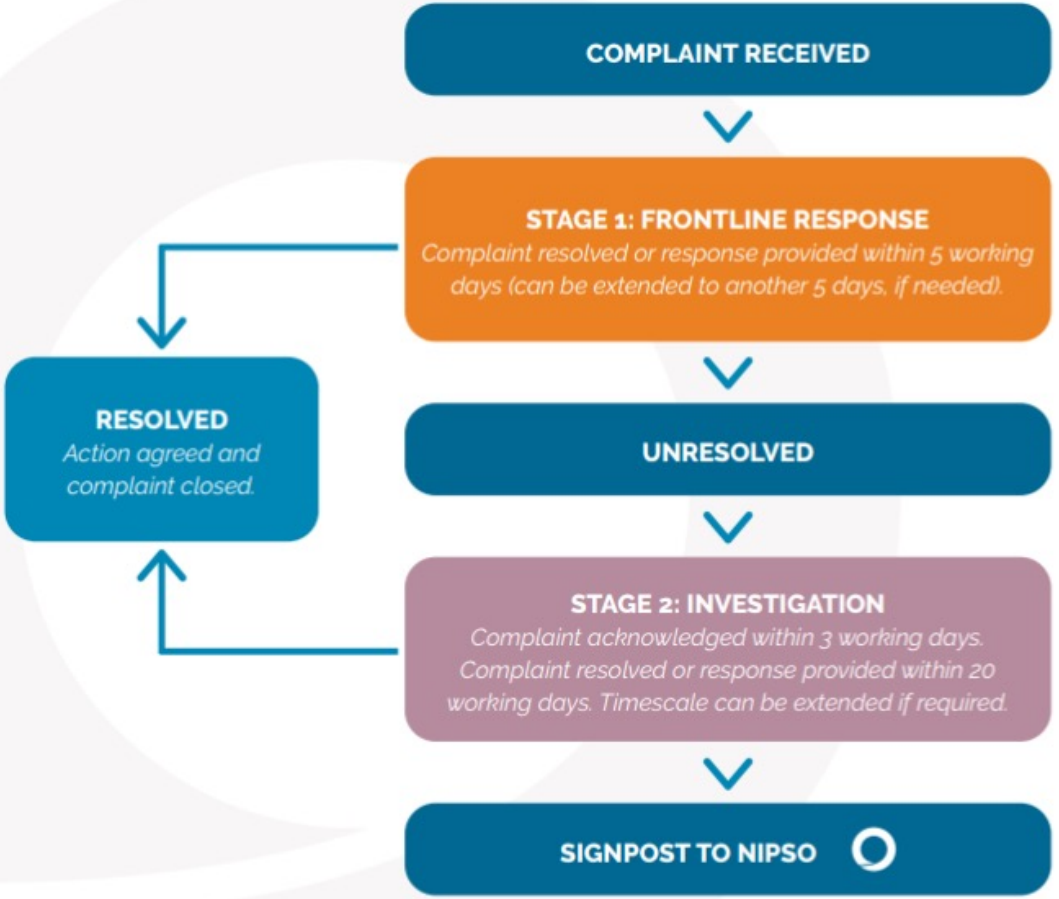
The Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP)



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Key elements of the MCHP

- A definition of what is a complaint that complies with the one provided in the MCHP
- Follow the designated timeframes within each stage
- Two stages: Stage 1 - Frontline Response (5 days)

  Stage 2 - Investigation (20 days)
- Recording, reporting and publishing of complaints data
- Requirement to learn from complaints for service improvement
- Ensure information on how to complain is widely published
- Provide / signpost to support to ensure there are no barriers to complain

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What does this mean for General Practice?

- Some changes from current timescales – from 10 days
- **Every** complaint should be recorded
- Requirement to evidence learning from complaints for service improvement
- Honest Broker role staying as it is for those who need to use it (note timescale does not change)
- External publication - other service providers are being asked to externally publish their complaints performance statistics, but FPS complaints data will continue to be published via SPPG
- However, some complaints related information should be shared externally to show how you are using complaints information e.g. an anonymised case study

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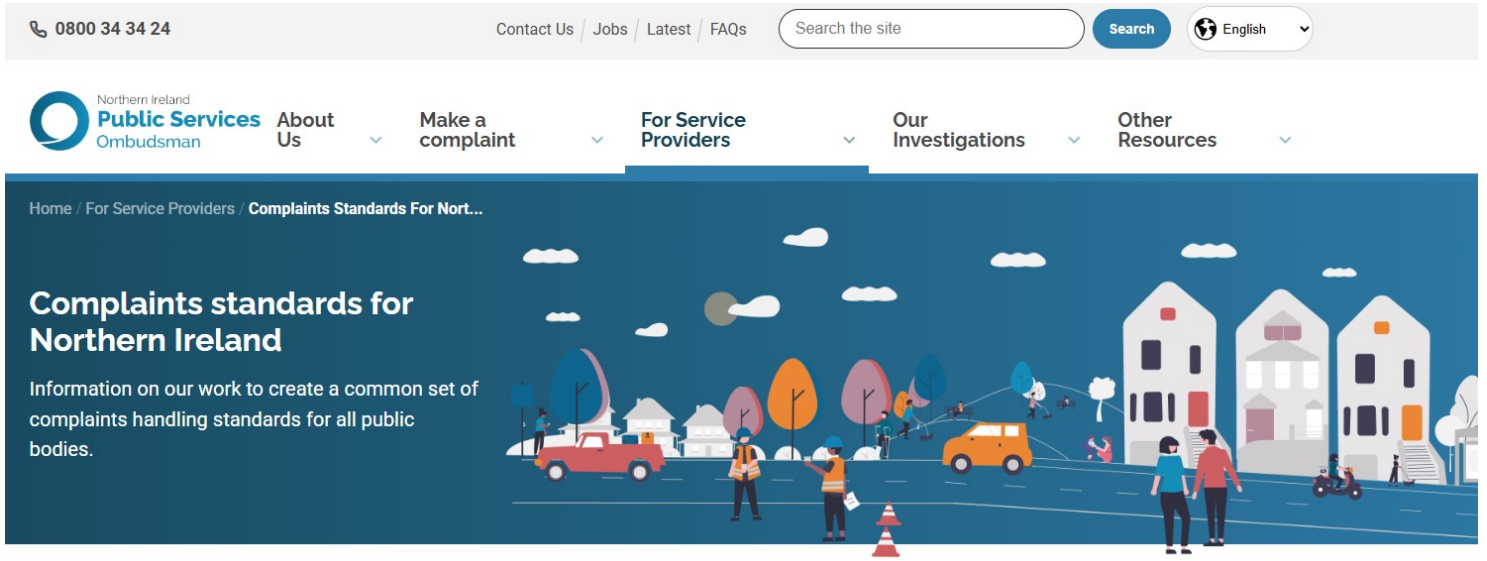
July 2025
MCHP published

6 month
implementation phase

January 2026
Compliance expected

Inappropriate Behaviour

- At times of stress people can act out of character or in ways which are inappropriate
- However – if someone is making a complaint this still needs to be addressed
- Ensure that your policies for Inappropriate Behaviour and Zero Tolerance comply with both the MCHP and the Regulations for removing someone from the register
- This does not mean that staff should be exposed to inappropriate behaviour – review your policies to ensure you can support staff and remain compliant with the statutory expectations



[Click on this link: Complaints standards for Northern Ireland | NIPSO]

Or search - https://www.nipso.org.uk/service-providers/complaints-standards

Health and social care

Since 2023 we have been working with health and social care organisations to create new complaints handling procedures for the sector. This sector contains a range of services, including hospitals, social care, nursing homes, and family practitioner services such as GPs, dentists and opticians.

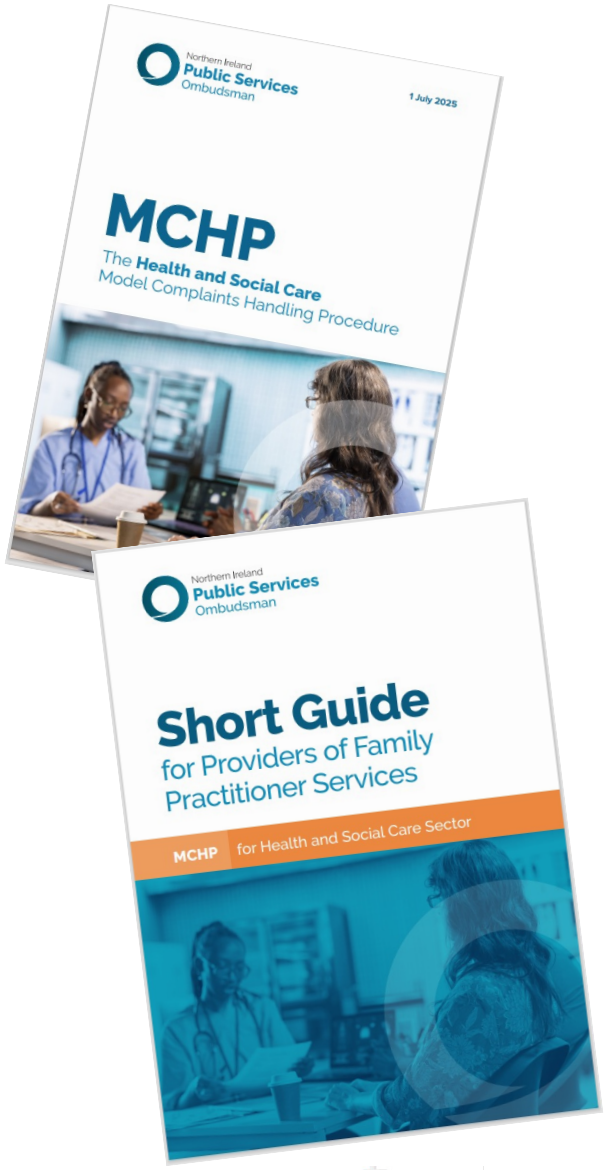
There is one MCHP for the whole sector supported by separate guidance for family practitioner service providers and commissioned social care providers. However all will follow the principles of the main guidance.

The MCHP was launched on 1 July 2025, with organisations given six months to implement the new standards from 1 January 2026.

The MCHP for the health and social care sector (1.11 MB, pdf)

The MCHP for family practitioner services - a short guide (925.14 KB, pdf)

The MCHP for social care commissioned services - a short guide (866.94 KB, pdf)



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Training Resources

These short videos explain why good complaints handling is important and provide helpful guidance to those investigating complaints.

On this page

- Resources for members of the public
- Resources for staff investigating complaints
- Resources for senior management

Resources for members of the public

How to Complain About a Public Body in Northern Ireland

Resources for staff investigating complaints

An Introduction to Good Complaints Handling

How to Investigate Complaints at Stage One

How to Investigate Complaints at Stage Two (Part One) - The Process

How to Investigate Complaints at Stage Two (Part Two) - Skills and Tips

How to Record Complaint Outcomes

How to Make and Communicate Good Decisions

Thank You

Questions & Comments Welcome

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