

Northern Ireland Police Fund

Client Complaints Policy and Procedure

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1. Purpose Of The Document

This complaints policy describes the procedures to be followed if a member of the public or client wishes to make a complaint against a member of staff from the Northern Ireland Police Fund.

The policy aims to cover what constitutes a valid complaint, how and to whom complaints can be made and the timeframe for response and resolution.

2. Introduction

It is the aim of the NIPF and its staff to give the best service possible to its clients at all times. This includes treating the client with courtesy and respect, respecting the client's right, and that of others to confidentiality, helping the client if they have any special needs and working hard to maintain high standards of service. The NIPF recognises the right of its clients to make complaints and indeed welcomes complaints as a valuable form of feedback about its services. The NIPF is committed to using information gained from complaints to help drive forward improvements to services and to better meet the needs of its clients.

3. Objectives

- To provide an effective means for clients or representatives to complain if they are dissatisfied with the service they receive
- To ensure complaints are dealt with in a courteous and efficient manner and are resolved without avoidable delay
- To maintain records of complaints made so that regular reviews can be produced for internal monitoring and public accountability.

The establishment of the Complaints Policy ensures that staff have a set of supporting procedures to give them the confidence and responsibility to deal with complaints in an efficient and effective manner.

4. Client Benefits

A complaints policy makes it clear to clients:

- How they can complain if they want to;
- What will happen when they complain;
- What they can expect the NIPF to do as a result of their complaint;
- What they can do if they are unhappy with our response.

5. What is a complaint?

A complaint, for the purpose of this policy, is defined as:

An expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by NIPF.

A client may complain about the standard of service received because

- NIPF has not achieved the standard of service we say we will provide, or
- We have not provided the service to the standard which the client thinks is reasonable, or
- Our staff behave in an unacceptable way (including rudeness, discourtesy or aggression) or

- We fail to do something which we have been asked to do which is reasonable and within our remit.

6. Complaints Not Covered By This Policy And Procedure

This complaints procedure can only be used if the client feels there has been a case of maladministration by the Fund. It cannot be used by a client who wishes to appeal the decision of the Board regarding a funding application.

Grievances staff may have about the NIPF as an employer or grievances the NIPF may have about a member of staff should be made through the disciplinary and grievance procedures or other internal channels.

7. Rights

Clients have the right:

- To be kept informed of the progress of their complaints;
- To receive an apology if a complaint is upheld;
- To be informed of any changes to our policies or procedures arising from a complaint.

NIPF staff have the right:

- To be treated with respect and courtesy at all times by both clients and managers.

8. Information And Publicity

The complaints procedure will be publicised to our clients through our website and on request by post.

9. How To Complain

Anyone who wishes to make a complaint should do so in writing to the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Police Fund. We will acknowledge written complaints by letter within 3 working days, and as soon as possible thereafter advising who will be responsible for dealing with the complaint and the time frame within which a response can be expected.

The NIPF will operate a 2-stage complaint process, with clear opportunities for complaints to be escalated from one stage to the next. The process seeks to resolve complaints as quickly as possible. At Stage 1 complaints will be investigated by the Chief Executive Officer. Stage 2 complaints will be addressed by the Fund's Board of Directors.

9.1 Stage 1

At Stage 1 complaints will be investigated by the Chief Executive Officer who will:

- Summarise the main issues to be resolved, and agree these with the client
- Investigate the complaint
- Provide a detailed response to the client setting out the findings and the reasons for the findings.

This should be completed within 10 working days. Where the client cannot be provided with a full response within the required timescale, an interim response will be sent within 5 working days.

9.2 Stage 2

If the client is dissatisfied with the response to their complaint at Stage 1, they may request that the matter be escalated to Stage 2. In requesting escalation, the client should identify in writing which elements of their complaint they feel have not been adequately addressed. Complaints will be escalated to Stage 2 where the response at Stage 1 is considered by the client to be incomplete, unclear or unhelpful.

When a complaint is escalated to Stage 2 it will be investigated by the NIPF Board who will:

- Investigate the complaint by appointing a Director to investigate the matter
- Provide a detailed response to the client setting out the findings and the reasons for the findings.

9.3 Complaints Regarding the Chief Executive Officer

If the client's complaint concerns the Chief Executive directly then the initial letter of complaint should be addressed to the Chairman of the Police Fund and will be immediately escalated to Stage 2, to be addressed directly by the NIPF Board.

10. Outcome

If a complaint regarding staff actions or behaviour is found to be valid, then the issue will be referred to the appropriate human resource policy/procedure such as the disciplinary and grievance procedure and investigated. This will be regarded as an outcome for this complaints procedure.

11. Monitoring, Evaluation And Reporting

We will keep a record of complaints, including dates received, acknowledged, responded, type of complaint, actions taken and lessons learned.

12. External Appeal

If, following investigation at Stages 1 and 2 of the complaints procedure the client remains dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, they may escalate the complaint by complaining to the NI Ombudsman. Contact details are in Appendix 1.

13. Final Resolution

The Fund will not engage in communication once an individual complaint is deemed to have been effectively dealt with through the complaints process.

14 Appendix 1 – The Complaints Procedure Summary

The staff of the Northern Ireland Police Fund are committed to providing an efficient, impartial and courteous service. If you feel dissatisfied with any part of our service please let us know.

You can take up your complaint by writing to the Chief Executive Officer of the Fund at the following address:

The Northern Ireland Police Fund
Maryfield Complex
100 Belfast Road
Holywood
BT18 9QY

To help us investigate and resolve our complaint as quickly as possible, please provide the following information:

- Your name and address
- Clear description of your concern or complaint
- Details of what you would like us to do to put it right
- Copies of any relevant documents
- A daytime telephone number where we can contact you.

We will try to resolve your complaint quickly, and with the minimum of inconvenience to you. We aim to:

- Send an acknowledgement of your complaint in writing within 3 working days
- Respond fully to your complaint within 20 working days.

If you are dissatisfied with the Chief Executive Officer's response or if your complaint is against the Chief Executive you can take your complaint to a second stage where the matter will be further considered by the Board of Directors of the Company. In this case any correspondence should be addressed to the Chairman of NIPF at the address above. If after this stage you remain dissatisfied you can further escalate your complaint to the Commissioner for Complaints, also known as the Ombudsman.

You can contact the Ombudsman at either of the following:

Commissioner for Complaints

The Ombudsman

Progressive House

Freepost BEL 1478

33 Wellington Place

Belfast

BELFAST

BT1 6BR

BT1 6HN

Freephone: (0800) 343424

Tel: 028 9023 3821