



HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE



This leaflet tells you how to make a complaint if you are not happy with the service we provide. We are keen to hear about any mistakes you think we have made so we can learn from them.

Other formats

We can give you this leaflet in other languages and formats. If you need this, please get in touch using the details on page 4.

About the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI)

We have 45 permanent staff who support the Chief Electoral Officer. His task is to keep complete and accurate electoral registers and run free and fair elections. The Chief Electoral Officer is independent of government or any political party and is the only person responsible for running EONI.

What is a complaint?

If you tell us that you are unhappy with the service we provide, we will treat that as a complaint. You can tell us you are unhappy by speaking to us in person, by phone, or by sending us a written complaint by post, fax or e-mail.

You may complain about anything we do, for example:

- the standard of service you received when you registered as an elector by joining the electoral register or the way we run elections;
- the effectiveness or efficiency of our work, for example how long we take to reply to a letter; or
- the way you were treated by a member of our staff.

We try hard to deliver a high-quality service to all members of the public. If you think we have let you down, please tell either the member of staff you are unhappy with, or if you prefer, his or her manager. If you are not happy with the way they respond, please tell us so that we can learn from any mistakes that have been made.

We are not responsible for everything to do with joining the electoral register or the way elections are run. Some of the things which we are not responsible for are listed on page 7 of this leaflet.

If you want to complain about any of these matters, it will be quicker if you apply direct to the organisation that is responsible. If you make your complaint to us and we think it is the responsibility of another organisation, we will tell you and give you information on how to contact them. If you have made your complaint in writing, we will pass it to the responsible organisation and tell you what we have done.

General principles we will follow

- We will investigate your complaint and someone other than the person you are complaining about will deal with it.
- We will consider your complaint fairly and independently.
- We will deal with you professionally and in a sensitive and polite way at all times.
- Our Management Board will monitor the complaints process and take any action needed.
- We will write each year to a sample of people who made complaints to ask if they were happy with the way they were treated. We will then use their answers to improve the process.

Who can make a complaint?

You can make a complaint if you are unhappy with anything we have done or have failed to do. You may make the complaint yourself or through another person such as a member of your family, a councillor, MLA or MP or a solicitor.

Complaints process

We have a simple three-stage complaints process.

Stage 1 – if you are unhappy with the service you have received, please tell the member of staff, or if you do not want to talk to that person, his or her manager. Unless you tell us, we will not know you are unhappy and will not be able to make sure that any

mistake does not happen again. Our staff will try to deal with your concerns straightaway or, if this is not possible, within five working days. If you are not happy with the explanation the member of staff gives you, you may ask to speak with their line manager.

Stage 2 – you should explain why you are not happy with our service to the manager who will speak to you straightaway, where possible, and will give you an explanation within five working days of receiving your complaint. They will do all they can to sort it out informally. However, if you are not happy, please move to stage 3 of the process by filling in a complaint form.

Stage 3 – at stage 3 either the Chief Electoral Officer or a senior member of the management team who has not been involved with the complaint itself will deal with it for you. To help us deal fully with all the issues it would be helpful if you could fill in a complaints form. We have designed this to allow you to set out all the details of your complaint so that we can consider everything. You can fill in the form yourself, or ask someone else such as family, a friend or a member of the staff, either to fill it in for you or to help you to fill it in.

How can I get a complaints form?

You can:

- use the one attached to this leaflet;
- download it from www.eoni.org.uk;
- phone 0800 4320 712 (textphone 0800 3284 502) and ask for one;
- collect one at any of our offices – the addresses are in the phone book and online at www.eoni.org.uk: or
- write to;

The Helpline Supervisor
EONI
St. Anne's House
15 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1ER.

You can get this form in other formats and languages if you ask using the contact details above.

If you use the complaints form, it will make it easier and probably quicker for us to deal with your complaint. The form is particularly helpful for stage-3 complaints. However, if you want, you can use it to make a written complaint at stages 1 or 2.

What information will I need to provide?

To help us deal fully with your complaint, it would be helpful if you could give us:

- the name, full address and contact details of the person making the complaint;
- full details of the complaint, with as much information as possible, including dates, the sequence of events which caused the problem and, if you know them, the names of the members of staff involved; and
- how you would like us to contact you as well as the best time for our staff to contact you.

Depending on how complicated your complaint is, we may have to ask you for more information.

How quickly will you deal with my complaint?

If you make your complaint by phone or in person, we will deal with it straightaway whenever we can. When that is not possible, we will give you a full explanation within five working days of receiving the complaint.

If you make your complaint in writing, we will let you know we have received your complaint within three working days and give you a response within:

- five working days in the case of a stage-1 or stage-2 complaint; or
- 15 days once you have made a formal stage-3 complaint.

If we can't meet any of these deadlines, we will write to you to explain why, and with a date for when we will give you a detailed response.

What will you do with the information I give you?

We will treat all information that you give us during the complaints process in the strictest confidence and make it available only to those staff who need to know it. If we sort out your complaint during stages 1 or 2 of the process, the member of staff who dealt with it will write a brief report on it. This will be considered, along with reports of stage-3 complaints, at the first meeting of our Management Board after the complaint was made. The Board will discuss whether there are any lessons to be learnt from each complaint and, if appropriate, change policies and procedures to help reduce future problems.

Can I appeal against the way you have decided to deal with my complaint?

If you are unhappy with the response you receive at stage 3, you may ask the Chief Electoral Officer to review your complaint and the way in which it has been handled. You can contact him as follows:

Post: The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland
 St Anne's House
 15 Church Street
 Belfast
 BT1 1ER

Phone: 028 9044 6660

E-mail: Douglas.Bain@eoni.org.uk

The Chief Electoral Officer will write to you to let you know that he has received your request and tell you how he will deal with it. Normally he will give you the chance to add anything you want to what you have said on your complaint form, either by writing to him or, if you prefer, meeting with him or a person he chooses to represent him.

Because the Chief Electoral Officer is independent, there is no one else in the public service in Northern Ireland to complain to if you are unhappy with his decision about your complaint. You could take the matter up with your councillor, MLA or MP or, if you think you have a good case, you may want to challenge his decision in the courts.

Before taking legal action, we recommend that you ask a solicitor about your complaint. You may get free legal advice in certain circumstances. If you ask, the Chief Electoral Officer will arrange to have the way in which your complaint was dealt with, but not the

merits of his decision, reviewed by an independent person who is experienced in reviewing complaints in the public sector.

Other organisations

We are not responsible for:

- promoting public awareness of joining the electoral register or voting;
- regulating political parties and their funding;
- examining accounts of election expenses;
- removing of posters after an election; and
- what the law is, for calling and carrying out elections.

Promoting public awareness of joining the electoral register and voting, regulating political parties and their funding, and examining accounts of election expenses are the responsibility of the Electoral Commission. You can get in touch with them as follows,

By post: The Electoral Commission
 Seatem House
 28-32 Alfred Street
 Belfast
 BT2 8EN

By phone: 028 9089 4020

By textphone:18001 028 9089 4020

By e-mail: inforthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Your local office of Road Service is responsible for enforcing the law on **removing posters after an election**. You can find the contact details at www.roadsni.gov.uk, in the Yellow Pages under 'Government Offices' or under 'Road Service' in the telephone directory.

The Rights and International Relations Division of the Northern Ireland Office is responsible for advising the Secretary of State on **all aspects of electoral law in Northern Ireland**. If your complaint is about the law itself rather than the way in which we have carried it out you should complain to the NIO. You can get in touch with them in the following ways.

Post: Elections Unit
Northern Ireland Office
11 Millbank
London
SW1P 4PN

Phone: 0207 210 6569

Textphone: 028 9052 7668

E-mail: Electionsunit@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk

Electoral Office for Northern Ireland – Complaint Form

Your Details

Last Name _____ Title _____

First names _____

Address and postcode _____

Phone number _____

Your Complaint

(Please give us a background to your complaint and include any documents to do with your argument. To help us handle your complaint as quickly and as helpfully as possible, please give us as much information as possible including, for example, the date and time of events and the names of the members of staff involved, if you know them.)

If you need more space to explain your complaint, please carry on writing on a separate page and attach it to the back of this form.)

If you have delayed in reporting your complaint to us, please tell us why.

Please tell us how you would like us to respond to your complaint.

Declaration

I believe that the information I have given is true and complete.

Your signature _____ Date _____

Please return this form to: Helpline Supervisor
Electoral Office for Northern Ireland
1st Floor, St Anne's House
15 Church Street
Belfast BT1 1ER
Email: info@eoni.org.uk

We will write to people who make complaints to ask if they were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled. We will use the answers to improve the process.