



Western Health
and Social Care Trust



we are
west
Caring together.
Committed to better.

Complaints, Comments & Compliments Guidance for Service Users

June 2026

Introduction

The Western Health & Social Care Trust is committed to providing high quality treatment and care. We value all service user feedback and use this information to help us improve our services.

We want to know when users have been impressed or pleased with our service. We can use these examples to share best practice amongst our staff. In addition, compliments can help boost morale. However, if something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, we would like to be informed.

The Trust follows the Statement of Principles as per the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Model Complaints Handling Procedures 2025. These are the overarching basic principles that public services' 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.



The Trust's complaints handling procedures reflect these principles and aims to help drive a focus on the early resolution of complaints and promote the use of complaints information for learning and improvement.

The Trust is committed to an open, just and learning culture, and our complaints process reflect these values in investigating, responding and learning from complaints. Effective service user and public involvement is an important aspect of our governance arrangements, and, as such, helps us to improve the quality of the services we offer and safeguard high standards of care and treatment. This is why

Complaints, Comments & Compliments Guidance for Service Users

complaints and compliments are encouraged, will be taken seriously and should be viewed as a positive opportunity for learning and improving services.

We are strongly committed to a listening, acting, improving approach to service user feedback that is honest and thorough. The Trust seeks to make sure that all feedback is handled courteously, with sensitivity and without delay. We recognise the physical, sensory, communication or language barriers that some service users may face when seeking to raise a complaint or compliment and the personal anxieties and concerns some may have with regard to raising a complaint. No one should be discriminated against or suffer any adverse consequences as a result of making a complaint and we will take a person-centred approach to enable a service user to raise their concerns.

This guidance document describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint or compliment. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.

Please do not be worried about complaining, it will not affect how we deal with you or the services you are receiving. We want to know about your concerns so that we can, where possible, make improvements or help resolve a problem for you.

Western Trust Complaints Handling Procedure

What is a Complaint?

We regard a complaint as:

“Any expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.”

If you need to complain about something, we encourage you to do so. We also understand that your complaint may involve more than one HSC body or service, or relate to both health and social care services, or it may be about someone working on our behalf.

Complaints about an independent sector provider, contracted to deliver a service on behalf of the Trust, should be raised with the provider directly. If the complaint has not been resolved, further advice can be requested from the Trust on next steps.

What the Complaints Procedure covers:

You can complain about things like:

- failure or refusal to provide a service
- inadequate quality or standard of care and treatment, or an unreasonable delay in the provision of care
- failure to properly implement or follow policy, procedures and standards
- failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
- failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
- poor conduct, behaviour or attitude of a member of staff
- a concern about the actions or service of an organisation who is delivering services on our behalf
- disagreement with a decision, (except where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process).

What cannot be dealt with through the Complaints Procedure:

There are some things we are unable to deal with through our Complaints Handling Procedure. These include:

- a routine first-time request for a service, for example a request for an appointment or a request for a specific course of treatment
- a request for a second opinion in respect of care or treatment
- matters relating to private healthcare or treatment
- matters relating to services not provided by or funded by the NHS

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- a previously concluded complaint or a request to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
- a complaint made by an employee of the Trust or health service provider or other person in relation to their employment contract
- a complaint that is being or has been previously investigated by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)
- a complaint arising from a suggested failure to comply with a request for information under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act
- matters where there is intent to or instigation of legal action
- matters where there is an ongoing criminal investigation

We also realise that it is not possible to list everything that you cannot complain about. If other procedures can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

What Happens when I have Complained:

Our Complaints Handling Procedure has two stages:

Stage 1: Frontline Response

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and close to where we provided the service. Where appropriate, this could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, with immediate action to resolve the problem.

Sometimes we will have to make some enquiries before we can respond to your complaint. It is our aim to give you our response at Stage 1, within 5 working days or less, however there may be circumstances where we need more time to provide you with a full and complete response. If this is the case, we will aim to provide you with a response within 10 working days.

If we cannot resolve your complaint at this stage, we will explain why and tell you what you can do next. We will explain that a more detailed investigation may be required under Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure. As a complainant, you may also request that your complaint is managed under Stage 2 Investigation. Should you choose to do this, you should provide the Trust with details of what you remain dissatisfied with and the outcome you are seeking.

You can request that your complaint is escalated to Stage 2 at any stage of the Stage 1 Complaints Procedure. However, if the Trust has responded to your complaint at Stage 1 and you remain dissatisfied, you should request further investigation of your complaint at Stage 2 within 30 days of receiving the outcome at Stage 1. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a Stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require a detailed investigation that cannot be achieved within 5 working days.

At Stage 2 we will:

- acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 3 working days
- where appropriate, discuss your complaint with you to understand why you remain dissatisfied and what outcome you are looking for
- try to resolve the complaint where possible through alternative resolution approaches such as mediation or conciliation; and
- explain the timeframe for a Stage 2 written response, which we aim to provide within 20 working days

If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will agree revised time limits with you and keep you updated on progress. We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint and/or provide you with contact information if you have further enquiries.

HOW DO I MAKE A COMPLAINT?

Who can complain?

Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services, or a service contracted or commissioned by us, can make a complaint. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, this will normally require the person's verbal or written consent. Please also read the sections on **Getting help to make your complaint** and **Consent** in this guidance.

How do I complain?

You can complain in person at the place where you have received care, treatment or advice, or where the incident that you want to complain about happened.

It is easier for us to resolve complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. Please talk to a member of our staff at the service you are complaining about. They will always try to resolve any problems on the spot if possible.

You can also complain by using our online web form [Online Complaints Form](#), available on the Trust website www.westerntrust.hscni.net or by email, by phone, or in writing. Alternatively you can complete the Complaints Form including in this guidance and send to our office.

The Western Trust Complaints Department can be contacted at:

By post:

Complaints Department
Trust Headquarters
MDEC
Altnagelvin Area Hospital
Londonderry
BT47 6SB

By Email: complaints.department@westerntrust.hscni.net

By phone:

028 7134 5171 or Direct Dial: 028 7161 1226

Phone lines are open **10.00am to 12.00 noon & 2.00pm to 4.00pm**, Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays. A brief summary of your complaint can be taken via phone.

When submitting your complaint, please provide:

- your full name and address
- your phone number, (if you are happy to provide it)
- your email address (if this is your preferred method of contact)
- the full name, address and date of birth of the person affected (if you are complaining on behalf of somebody else)
- as much helpful detail as you can about the complaint
- what has gone wrong; and
- what outcome you are seeking

Providing this information will help us to clearly identify the problem and what we need to do to resolve it.

How long do I have to make a complaint?

Normally you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the event you want to complain about, or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain

In exceptional circumstances (for example bereavement, poor health, communication difficulties, limited support or you may have only recently become aware of the issue(s) of concern) we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why. If we decide that, because of the time that has passed since the incident occurred, we cannot consider your complaint, we will confirm our rationale in writing.

Responsibilities of Complainants

As a service user of the Trust, you have the right to expect the best possible services. If we fall short, you have the right to complain. When you complain, we ask you to follow these guiding principles:

- Provide adequate details of your complaint
- Set out clearly the cause for dissatisfaction
- Provide accurate details and supporting correspondence or other relevant supporting evidence
- If there has been a delay in submitting your complaint explain the cause of that delay
- Explain what you believe to be a satisfactory outcome
- Treat our staff with good manners, politeness and respect at all times
- Accept that we will act fairly and promptly in dealing with your complaint
- Be reasonable and open minded and listen to reasonable explanations; and
- Be realistic. It may not always be possible to achieve the outcome you want.

HOW DO I MAKE A COMPLIMENT?

We value compliments about the treatment and care we provide and share these with the staff and service that is being complimented.

We are committed to providing high quality treatment and care. Letting us know when we meet this standard gives helpful feedback to staff and has a positive effect on staff morale.

Compliments also help us identify areas of best practice which can be shared with other services and teams within the Trust and promote confidence in Trust services.

You can share a compliment in person at the place where you received care, treatment or advice or you can also share your positive feedback by submitting an email to: Compliments@westernstrust.hscni.net

Alternatively, you may wish to share your health and social care experience on Care Opinion www.careopinion.org.uk

[Care Opinion](#) is a place where you can share your experience of health or care services, and help make them better for everyone.

At Care Opinion we make it safe and simple to share your story online and see other people's stories too. You can see how stories are leading to change.

We think that by sharing honest experiences of care, we learn to see the world differently. Working together, we can all help make care better.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Consent

When we look into a complaint, we may need to review information from the service user's health or social care records to help us understand what happened and provide a full response.

It is good practice for us to explain what information may be shared, why it might be needed, and who may have access to it. Only staff directly involved in investigating the complaint will see this information, and it will be used solely for that purpose.

If a service user prefers that their information is not shared, we will respect their wishes. However, this may limit what we can investigate or the outcome we can provide. In some cases, we may still need to continue the investigation if there is an overriding public interest, such as a concern for safety.

Complaints by a third party should be made with the verbal or written consent of the individual concerned. There will be situations where it is not possible to obtain consent, such as when the:

- individual is a child and not of sufficient age or understanding to make a complaint on their own behalf;
- individual is incapable (for example, rendered unconscious due to an accident);
- individual has impaired judgement as a result of a learning disability, mental illness, brain injury or serious communication problems);
- subject of the complaint is deceased; and
- delay in the provision of consent may result in a delay in the resolution of the complaint.

Expected Behaviour

The Western Trust recognises that it can be challenging for complainants and services alike to manage complaints well, and that there can be high emotional content involved. It is important that anyone involved in a complaint feels adequately and appropriately supported.

To assist everyone involved in managing the complaint effectively, there should be a clear understanding of the expected behaviours from the outset, to ensure constructive dialogue aimed at resolving the concern.

The Trust believes it is important to distinguish between people who make several different complaints because they genuinely believe things have gone wrong and people whose behaviour is unreasonable or abusive. Each complaint will be

considered on its own merit and a decision made as to whether it is genuine or vexatious.

What if I remain dissatisfied?

After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with either our decision or the way in which we have dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) to look at it. NIPSO is the final stage for complaints about HSC services in Northern Ireland. NIPSO is an independent organisation that investigates complaints. The service provided by NIPSO is free. It is not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

NIPSO generally expects complaints to be brought to them within six months since you received correspondence from us informing you that the complaints handling procedure is complete and of your right to refer your complaint to NIPSO.

NIPSO will generally ask you to provide details of your complaint and a copy of our final response to your complaint. You can contact NIPSO online or call 0800 34 34 24.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint. See Further Resources below on **Getting help to make my complaint**

NIPSO's contact details are:

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Web: [NIPSO](#) (link opens in new window)

If you would like to visit NIPSO in person, you must make an appointment.

Their freepost address is: FREEPOST NIPSO

If NIPSO cannot investigate your complaint and your complaint requires an alternative route for independent review, NIPSO will tell you and provide you with the relevant contact details.

Further Resources

Getting help to make your complaint

We understand that you may be unable, or reluctant, to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a service user who is dissatisfied with our service as long as the service user has given their permission for us to deal with that person. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

The **Patient Client Council (PCC)** www.pcc-ni.net is an organisation that provides free and confidential advice and support to patients and other members of the public in relation to HSC services. The service promotes an awareness and understanding of the rights and responsibilities of patients and can advise and support people who wish to make a complaint about an HSC organisation.

Further information and contact details can be found on the PCC web site www.pcc-ni.net or email: info@pcc-ni.net or by telephoning on 0800 917 0222.

We are committed to making our services easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equality duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you to access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, tell us in person, contact us through an interpreter (if required) on 028 71 611266 or email us at Complaints.Department@westerntrust.hscni.net

We can also provide information in other languages and formats, for example:

- easy read versions of your complaints information
- sign language videos of your complaints information
- complaint information in other languages
- how to request information in other formats for example large font, or in a different language
- how to request an interpreter
- who to contact if the service user would like to discuss their accessibility requirements or has questions.

Regulated Establishments eg: Nursing Homes / Residential homes

If your complaint relates to a placement we have made in an establishment such as a nursing or residential home, you can complain to the provider of care or, if you prefer, you can raise your concerns with us.

If you are not happy with the response you receive, you can refer your complaint to the Ombudsman.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority will monitor how complaints about regulated services are handled. Contact Details as follows:

Belfast Office:

9th Floor Riverside Tower, 5 Lanyon Place, Belfast, BT1 3BT

Tel: 028 9051 7500 / 028 9051 7501

Omagh Office:

Hilltop, Tyrone & Fermanagh Hospital, Omagh, Co. Tyrone, BT79 0NSTel:

028 8224 5828 / 028 8225 2544

Email - info@rqia.org.uk

The Children (NI) Order, 1995 Representation and Complaint Procedure

The Trust is committed to providing its children and young people's treatment, care, and services in partnership with children, young people, parents, and carers.

We want to give you the best possible service. We want to treat everyone with respect and courtesy at all times. In most cases we do, but sometimes things go wrong. When that happens, we want to hear about it so we can try and put things right. Visit the Children's Order Complaints page to find out more about this process.

WESTERN HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRUST COMPLAINTS FORM

Section 1 – About you

In relation to the concerns being raised are you the: **Patient** ☐ **Complainant** ☐ **Both** ☐

THE PATIENT

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

H&C / Hospital No. (if known): _____

Date of Birth: _____

Telephone Number: _____ Alternative (mobile): _____

Email Address: _____

Complaints made on behalf of a patient or client (known as the complainant) – can you please complete the following section in order for the Complaints Department to liaise directly with you.

Please note: The Consent Form needs to be completed and signed by the Patient / Client concerned to enable complaint to be processed.

Please can you detail why the patient/client is unable to make a complaint themselves?

THE COMPLAINANT

Relationship to the patient / client: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

Telephone Number: _____ Alternative (mobile) _____

Email Address: _____

ABOUT YOUR COMPLAINT

In relation to the raised concern the patient / client's Health and Social Care Records will be obtained as part of the investigation process. Are you happy for this to occur?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☐

I would like further details

If there has been a delay of more than 6 months in telling us of your complaint, please state why?

DETAILS OF COMPLAINT

Outline the background to the complaint and give a description of what you think the service failed to do, or did wrongly.

Try to include as much detail as you can detailing what service it relates to and any named staff.

Documents may be attached to your complaint. Please attach only specific items as necessary if you feel these will support your comments.

Please Select Service Location relating to Complaint - Select one of the following:

Altnagelvin Hospital

☐

South West Area Hospital

☐

Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex

☐

Other _____

Desired Complaint Outcome

What remedy do you hope to achieve as a result of making a complaint?

Under the terms of the Equality Act 2010, a disability is defined as a 'physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities. We welcome complaints from people with disabilities.

We want to communicate with you in a way that meets your needs.

Do you consider yourself to have a disability? YES ☐ NO ☐ PREFER NOT TO SAY ☐

Do you have any communication or support needs? E.g. documentation provided in easy read, large print, and braille or via email? YES ☐ NO ☐ PREFER NOT TO SAY ☐

If yes, please provide details.

E.g. documentation provided in easy read, large print, and braille or via email?

DETAILS OF THE COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT

COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT

TRUST HEADQUARTERS

MDEC BUILDING ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL

GLENSHANE ROAD

LONDONDERRY BT47 6SB

Contact Email address: complaints.department@westerntrust.hscni.net

Complaints Department Direct Line: 02871 611226 Main Hospital Number: 02871 345171

A quick guide to the Complaints Procedure: information for service users

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing. We have a **2 stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need in-depth investigation, we will talk to you about this, agree a way forward and keep you updated on our progress.

STAGE 1: FRONTLINE RESPONSE

We will always try to respond to your complaint quickly, **within 5 working days** if we can. If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at Stage 2.

STAGE 2: INVESTIGATION

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at Stage 1.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **3 working days**. We will confirm the issues of complaint to be investigated and what you want to achieve.

We will investigate the complaint and give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than 20 working days unless there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.

NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask NIPSO to consider it.