



**COVID-19**  
RESPONSE

**NI MICRO-BUSINESS  
HARDSHIP FUND**



Northern Ireland  
Executive

# Appeals Procedure for NI Micro- business Hardship Fund



## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline Invest NI's procedure for the appeal of business decisions taken in relation to the provision of support to customers through the COVID-19 NI Micro-business Hardship Fund ("The Fund").

This procedure is separate from [Invest NI's standard Appeals Procedure](#) that outlines how customers can appeal a business decision taken in relation to the provision of other support.

## Introduction/Background

To support business, workers and the self-employed during the coronavirus outbreak, the UK Government and the NI Executive has launched a package of support, including loans, tax relief and cash grants.

The NI Micro-business Hardship Fund of £40 million has been developed to respond quickly and proportionately through the provision of funding to micro-businesses and qualifying Social Enterprises (SE) that are facing immediate cash flow difficulties due to the impact of COVID-19. The Hardship Fund is open to all micro-businesses that have not qualified for other regional and national support measures and meet the eligibility criteria set out.

The Fund is administered by Invest Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department for the Economy. Invest NI is committed to administering The Fund efficiently and effectively to provide the best possible outcome to meet the individual needs of applicants. All decisions taken on the eligibility and level of support to be offered to an applicant must be centred on the agreed eligibility criteria for The Fund and the need to provide value for money regarding any public funds disbursed.

However, we do recognise that in some instances applicants for The Fund may not agree with decisions made, so Invest NI aim to provide a fair and appropriate process through which appeals can be made and assessed.

Automated decisions, based on the information contained in the application form, and manual decisions based on agreed pre-determined eligibility checks, will be carried out to assess the eligibility of an applicant. Applicants have the option to access a human review of any decision if they feel a decision was wrongly made, based on the information provided.

## What is an Appeal?

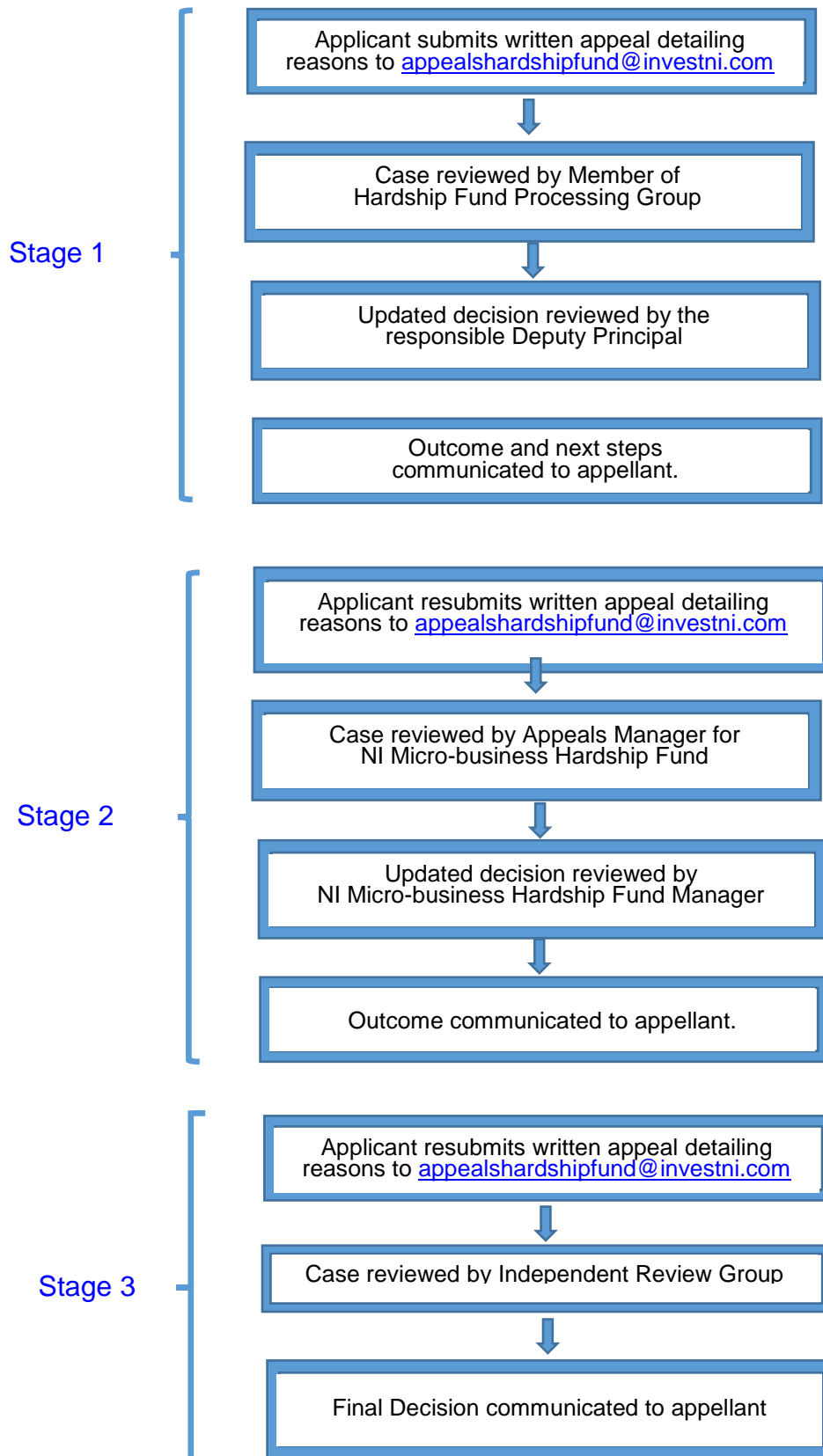
An appeal is any request for Invest NI to review a decision it has made in relation to the level of support offered to an applicant to The Fund, or a decision not to provide support. All appeals in relation to decisions must be made in writing to [appealshardshipfund@investni.com](mailto:appealshardshipfund@investni.com), within **3 working days** of receipt of notification of the original decision.



Invest NI will handle all appeals relating to the criteria for the NI Micro-business Hardship Fund using the process outlined in this document, while appeals in relation to scheme policy will be referred to the Department for the Economy.



## The Appeals Process





An appeal must contain the following Necessary Details to ensure we can deal with your enquiry in a timely manner:

1. Name of Applicant
2. Address of Applicant
3. Email address of Applicant
4. A clear explanation of the grounds on which the appeal is being made

The appeals process for the NI Micro-business Hardship Fund within Invest NI has three stages as described below:

#### Stage 1 – Hardship Fund Processing Group (HFPG)

The first stage to appeal a business decision is to send a written appeal to [appealshardshipfund@investni.com](mailto:appealshardshipfund@investni.com) including all the Necessary Details. The case will be reviewed by the HFPG. If this does not provide a resolution to the dispute, the appeal can be moved to the next stage.

#### Stage 2 – Responsible Manager

If the original decision remains unchanged after Stage 1 and the applicant wants to appeal further, they can submit a further appeal to the NI Micro-business Hardship Fund Appeals Manager via [appealshardshipfund@investni.com](mailto:appealshardshipfund@investni.com). The resubmitted appeal should contain all Necessary Details.

#### Stage 3 – Independent Review Group

If the original decision remains unchanged after Stage 2 and the applicant wants to appeal further, they can submit a further appeal to the Independent Review Group via [appealshardshipfund@investni.com](mailto:appealshardshipfund@investni.com). The resubmitted appeal should contain all Necessary Details. **Any decision made at this stage will be considered final.**

### **Responsibilities**

#### Reviewer

It is the responsibility of the reviewer at each stage to complete a fair and transparent review of the evidence, explain the rationale for their final decision and communicate it to the appellant.

#### Customer/Appellant

It is the responsibility of the Customer/Appellant to detail why they feel the original decision was incorrect or unfair and provide this in writing, within 3 working days of notification of the decision.

### **Contacts**



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All appeal requests should be made through [appealshardshipfund@investni.com](mailto:appealshardshipfund@investni.com). Where the dispute cannot be resolved internally, the customer can contact the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman directly using the details below:

By phone: 0800 34 34 24  
(this is a free phone number)

Or

028 90 233821

By text phone: 028 9089 7789

By e-mail: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

By writing to: Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast BT1 6HN