

Annual Report: Ombudsman more relevant, higher impact than ever

25 October 2017

Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier has released the Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2016/17, saying it shows his Office is having a greater impact in more areas and on more lives so that people are treated fairly in New Zealand.

'In our role as a watchdog of freedom of information, we're clearing more complaints more quickly, using flexible and sophisticated ways of reaching resolution. This means more people getting timely information and answers', Peter Boshier said.

'Our handling of complaints under the Official Information Act, Ombudsmen Act and Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act means we achieved 700 remedies for New Zealanders over the past year.

'These are 700 solutions to problems people have experienced in their dealings with the public sector. Many more people frequently benefit, as the remedy can include an agency changing its systems so the problem won't recur.

'As an Office dedicated to resolving systemic issues across the public sector, we've released comprehensive reports into matters such as the use of mechanical restraints in prisons, or working with communities at times of massive change and disruption; both including recommendations acted upon by the agencies concerned.

'Our OPCAT inspections programme saw agencies accepting or partially accepting 149 recommendations for improvements in how we treat people held in detention, and we launched our guide to Reasonable Accommodation, a vital concept in ensuring human rights for people with disabilities,' Peter Boshier said.

'Within the Office, our focus on getting the right structure and systems in place, along with our increased support for agencies and growing public awareness of our role, mean we're very well placed to keep building on these gains and delivering timely and appropriate remedies for New Zealanders in coming years.

'When New Zealand's first Ombudsman was appointed in 1962, no one could have envisaged the scope and depth of work the Office would eventually undertake. This year's Annual Report

paints a compelling picture of the number of important areas of work we're involved in, and the very real impact we have in ensuring the rights of individuals are safeguarded and New Zealand's government is accountable and transparent', the Chief Ombudsman said.

Key facts: 2016/17 Annual Report

- Completed more OIA, OA, and LGOIMA complaints than we received, while more than halving our backlog of aged complaints, from 561 to 202; well on track to clearing the backlog completely by the end of June 2018 (one year earlier than expected)
- Achieved 700 remedies for the benefit of individuals and public administration, 20 percent more than in 2015/16
- Completed 79 percent of complaints within three months and 92 percent within six months
- Released comprehensive reports *Disclosure*, into the schools reorganisation process following the Canterbury earthquakes, and *A Question of Restraint*, into the use of tie-down beds and other mechanical restraints in selected prisons
- Visited 57 places of detention, 63 percent of these visits unannounced; made 185 recommendations for improvement, with 149 fully or partially accepted
- Launched the guide *Reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities*, a ground-breaking publication toward ensuring equal human rights for all New Zealanders
- Released *Strategic priorities for improving the operation of the OIA*, with many initiatives already underway, along with a model protocol for Ministers and agencies to establish clear and transparent processes when preparing OIA responses

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