

Annual Report highlights a pleasing year

17 October 2019

Public sector agencies are increasingly making use of advice and resources from the Ombudsman.

In the Chief Ombudsman's latest Annual Report, contacts for advice increased 29 percent, while more use was being made of guidance material, including the 23 new or updated guides that were published in the 2018/19 year.

Reflecting on a busy year, Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier said while the Ombudsman was best known for helping the community in its dealings with government agencies, it was just one of the roles.

"Dealing with complaints is extremely important, but so are matters such as lifting public sector performance as our provision of advice helps agencies deal with requests better.

"For example, I concluded nine official information practice investigations into six central government agencies and three local government agencies, another key method of improving public sector performance."

Mr Boshier also noted the broadening of his mandate to include three new initiatives.

"In June 2018, I was tasked with monitoring the treatment of patients detained in privately-run aged care facilities and detainees in court cells, and in July 2019 I received funding to build this role over the next three years. In April this year, I was given an enhanced role in relation to children in care. This will involve overseeing complaints and investigations relating to Oranga Tamariki and children and young people in care.

"Thirdly, I was delighted that Parliament saw fit to increase my funding so I can develop a flexible and responsive four-year Asia-Pacific Ombudsman institutional support programme. Ombudsmen have a long history of supporting the development of international integrity institutions, and I am committed to not only learning from, but also supporting other nations, especially in the Pacific."

Mr Boshier said that while the past year had been successful, work was well underway on the next phase of his work programme, including three key areas he would be focusing on.

"A top priority for me is to improve our relationship with tangata whenua. Our research shows Māori awareness of my office is unacceptably low, so a key focus will be increasing our engagement with Māori.

"I will also be working to improve awareness of the Protected Disclosures Act (whistle-blowers). Research we did earlier this year showed that just 9% of respondents were aware of

the Act, an alarmingly low figure given 21% of all respondents said they have witnessed serious wrongdoing at their workplace or previous workplaces.

“Lastly, I need to ensure that the rights of the disabled are at the heart of our work and culture. On 3 December, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we will launch our third *Making Disability Rights Real* report to Parliament and the United Nations, which we have produced with the Human Rights Commission and Disabled People’s Coalition. It is vital we further develop our capital in this area.”

The report can be read at <http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources-and-publications/corporate-documents>

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Selected highlights

- Net clearance rate of 98 percent for OIA complaints and 110 percent for LGOIMA complaints.
- Received 2,413 Ombudsmen Act complaints – clearance rate 98 percent.
- Provided advice on 440 occasions to public sector agencies, a 29 percent increase from last year.
- Completed 90 requests and enquiries for advice and guidance under the Protected Disclosures Act 2000 (‘whistleblowers’), 25 percent more than last year.
- Delivered 52 external speeches, presentations and training sessions to public sector agencies.
- Published 23 new or updated pieces of guidance material.
- Visited 40 places of detention, including 22 formal inspections, and had 92 percent of 288 recommendations for improvement accepted or partially accepted.
- Chief Ombudsman elected Regional President of the Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region (APOR) of the International Ombudsman Institute.

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