



Media statement

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Chief Ombudsman: new report ‘wakeup call’ for council leaders

The Chief Ombudsman says his latest report into official information practice at local authorities is a wakeup call for all council leaders about the importance of an open and transparent workplace culture—and their accountability for achieving that.

Peter Boshier today released *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act compliance and practice at Christchurch City Council*. He began his investigation during the tenure of former Chief Executive Dr Karleen Edwards, who left the Council in June this year.

Mr Boshier says his investigation identified serious concerns among Council staff about the behaviour of some members of the Executive Leadership Team to keep negative information from elected members and the public.

‘During my investigation, a number of staff from different parts of Council raised concerns with me about the behaviour of some members of the leadership team. I found the CE’s failure to take adequate action in response to these concerns was unreasonable.’

‘I have made the formal recommendation that Christchurch City Council immediately review the leadership team’s involvement in controlling the flow of information to the public and elected officials, to ensure an approach is adopted that is consistent with openness and transparency. I have suggested a number of actions to help achieve this, starting at the top.’

‘The Council has acted swiftly in response, providing me with a thorough improvement plan and already putting several of its points into action.’

‘I’m confident that the new Chief Executive and leadership team is serious about ensuring the behaviours identified during this investigation will not be tolerated at Christchurch City Council,’ Mr Boshier says.

Mr Boshier says his investigation also identified positives in LGOIMA practice at Christchurch City Council.

‘Timeliness is commendable, and the Council’s LGOIMA team provide excellent support when responding to requests. The website provides very helpful information, and systems and staff have coped with a steady increase in LGOIMA requests’, he says.

‘Nonetheless, a perception existed among staff that some leadership team members were not supportive of openness and transparency. Accountability for this ultimately rests with the Chief Executive, as does the culture within the Executive Leadership Team.’

‘I acknowledge the former CE’s statement that she considers she took appropriate action in response to staff concerns, and that she hadn’t known about some of the issues identified in my investigation.’

‘However, comments from staff from more than one part of Council indicated that the problems continued to occur, and a perception of secrecy existed. The Chief Executive is ultimately accountable for this’.

‘Where senior leaders role model behaviours that show a clear commitment to transparency, a culture of openness will follow. This also highlights the importance of staff feeling able to raise issues with their senior leaders in order to speak freely without fear of reprisal. It is imperative senior leaders take the time to listen and be open to hearing bad news.’

‘I will be closely monitoring Council’s progress on its improvement plan. I thank all staff, elected officials, and members of the public who took part in this investigation. I believe that Council has now put the building blocks in place to regain the trust of staff, elected members and the public, and that it is committed to creating an environment that promotes openness and transparency.’

Information on timeframes

The investigation *LGOIMA practice and compliance at Christchurch City Council* began in late 2018, during the tenure of former Chief Executive Dr Karleen Edwards. Dr Edwards left the Council in June 2019.

Acting Chief Executive Mary Richardson responded to the Chief Ombudsman’s provisional opinion, discussed the opinion with incoming Chief Executive Dawn Baxendale, and developed the improvement plan to address the Chief Ombudsman’s formal recommendation.

Dawn Baxendale took up her new role in October this year. The Chief Ombudsman will closely monitor progress in implementing his recommendation and suggested action points.

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[Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act compliance and practice at Christchurch City Council](#)