



Statement of Corporate Purpose

2013 – 2018

Ombudsman's message

Our statement of corporate purpose provides a high level overview of what we do and how we do it. It is the foundation for a series of different planning documents, including our annual office-wide strategic plan as well as division plans that guide the day-to-day functioning of our office.

Since the appointment of the first NSW Ombudsman in 1975, our office has aimed to ensure that the people of NSW are provided with fair, accountable and responsive administrative decision-making and practice

The role of our office has changed greatly since it was first created. In addition to handling complaints, we also:

- audit systems and inspect records
- conduct own motion inquiries and investigations
- review investigations conducted by agencies
- undertake research and project work
- provide training to organisations and their staff
- prepare a range of publications and guidelines on topics such as good administrative practice and complaint handling.

While many of the organisations we deal with are public authorities, our work in employment related child protection, as well as community services provided to children and people with disability sees us monitoring the actions of private sector organisations. The number of private sector organisations we deal with is likely to continue to increase with the move towards greater private sector involvement in service provision.

All public sector agencies are being asked to continually review the way in which they work, to find ways of working smarter, often with less funding. It is vital that our office continues to provide a high level of service to the community by both responding to complaints and other issues brought to us and also maintaining an ability to identify systemic and large scale administrative failings, conduct investigations, audits and other projects that add value and continue to act in the public interest. I believe this statement and the plans that sit alongside it provide the foundation for us to do this.

If you would like any further information about our office, please do not hesitate to call, write or email us.



Bruce Barbour
Ombudsman

Our role

The NSW Ombudsman is an impartial integrity body, independent of the government of the day and accountable to the community through the NSW Parliament.

Our role is to assist government agencies and some non-government organisations to improve the integrity and effectiveness of certain services through review, oversight, complaint handling, investigation and advice.

Our vision

Through our work we will improve the standard of accountability, integrity, fairness and service delivery to the citizens of NSW.

Our key stakeholders

Our key stakeholders are the community, NSW Parliament, the government, government agencies, non-government organisations and peak bodies, as well as other oversight bodies.

Our aim

We want to see fair, accountable and responsive administrative practice and service delivery in NSW. We work to promote:

- good conduct
- fair decision making
- protection of rights, and
- provision of quality services

in our own organisation and those we oversight.

Our corporate purpose

Our purpose is to:

- Help organisations to identify areas for improvement to service delivery, and ensure they are acting fairly, with integrity and in the public interest.
- Deal effectively and fairly with complaints and work with organisations to improve their complaint handling systems.
- Be a leading integrity agency.
- Be an effective organisation.

Our values

The Ombudsman expects that all staff of the Office will act with fairness, integrity and impartiality, respecting all those with whom we deal, to seek practical solutions and improvements that will benefit the community, including demonstrating the following values:

- Integrity – acting lawfully, honestly, ethically with good judgement and high professional standards.
- Impartiality – acting in a non-political manner, neither an advocate for complainants nor responding agencies but as an advocate for the public interest independent of government.
- Fair play – focussing internally and externally on fair and reasonable procedures, consistency and proportionality.
- Adding value – bringing clarity to problems and identifying practical solutions and improvements that benefit the community rather than simply apportioning blame.
- Respect – treating complainants, stakeholders and colleagues with dignity and respect.

Our guarantee of service

We will:

- consider each matter promptly and fairly, and provide clear reasons for our decisions
- where we are unable to deal with a matter ourselves, explain why, and identify any other appropriate organisation
- treat anyone who contacts us with dignity and respect
- help those people who need assistance to make a complaint to the Ombudsman
- maintain confidentiality where appropriate and possible, and
- add value through our work.

Our key functions

We act in the public interest by:

- investigating and resolving complaints directly
- assessing agency notifications, monitoring agency investigations and reviewing the handling of complaints by agencies
- keeping complaint handling systems under scrutiny
- inspecting records of law enforcement agencies to ensure compliance with legislation and good practice
- dealing with inquiries or referring people to pursue alternative means of redress where appropriate

- reviewing the delivery of community services
- reviewing the implementation of new legislation, and
- reporting on findings and recommendations.

Critical success factors

These critical success factors inform everything we do, and are aimed at helping to ensure we work efficiently and effectively. We will:

Engage effectively with partners and stakeholders

We will engage effectively with our partners and stakeholders, both through our everyday work and large scale projects and investigations.

Be flexible and responsive

We need to be flexible and responsive in all our work, able to react quickly and effectively to a changing environment, making practical and realistic recommendations.

Develop our workforce

We have to have a capable and flexible workforce to meet emerging challenges. This should be built on strong communication, good planning and clear leadership. We will ensure staff are provided with relevant and targeted training and development opportunities.

Develop best practice processes

We will continually look for opportunities to improve the way we do our work. This will include reviewing our approach to handling complaints, conducting investigations and large scale projects, and identifying improvements to our systems and processes. Our review processes and our internal audit program will help us to achieve this. Our Business Improvement Unit will continue to review and recommend improvements to our systems.

Our governance framework

Corporate governance promotes improved efficiency and better organisational performance, which is consistent with this statement of corporate purpose.

Having the best possible corporate governance framework in place will allow us to:

- enhance our performance
- understand and manage risks
- ensure transparency and accountability
- effectively fulfil our legal, social and ethical obligations, and
- detect and prevent fraudulent, dishonest and/or unethical behaviour within the office.

This framework is designed to show the Ombudsman, Parliament, government and the public that we are using our resources efficiently and effectively, and that we are achieving what we have committed to do. This also helps us to improve how we work and makes sure we are held accountable for our decisions.

The management of our office is overseen and driven by the senior officers group (SOG) and the division managers group (DMG).

The SOG is made up of the Ombudsman, three Deputy Ombudsmen, and the Directors of the corporate branch and strategic projects division. The SOG provides the Ombudsman with advice and guidance on the strategic direction of the office. The SOG usually meets weekly to update each other on their work and discuss any significant issues within their branch.

One meeting each month is the Senior Officers Group Management Meeting, during which the SOG considers reports from each Division on the preceding month, as well as office wide information relating to areas such as legislative changes and budget.

The DMG is made up of the managers of each division. They meet at least once a month to discuss operational issues and any changes to office policy and procedure.

Our business planning framework

Our business planning framework is built around this statement of corporate purpose. The office's four key corporate purposes are the foundation for planning across the office, and inform the plans developed by the divisions each year. These plans will also be informed by the funding available to the office, along with the risks the office faces in performing its various functions.

The office-wide strategic plan is reflected in the yearly performance statement in the annual report. The plan will be developed and released at the same time as the annual report, and will outline the office's main aims against the four key corporate purposes.

Measuring, tracking and reporting our performance

Information about the quantity, quality, timeliness and impact of our work is essential to achieving our corporate goals. Performance benchmarks measuring these factors are established at the corporate, team and individual staff level and workflow statistics are used to inform procedural changes.

We track our performance at two levels — in relation to individual matters including complaints and projects and in relation to our systems and structures for completing work.

Data from our case management systems is used to monitor turnaround times and identify where there may be backlogs, delays or inefficiencies.

In the past few years, we have also worked to develop office-wide performance indicators. This has been challenging, as our office has a broad jurisdiction with varying responsibilities. Some of the performance indicators now in place include:

- Initial assessment and advice/acknowledgement to complainant within 10 working days of receipt of a complaint – benchmark 80%.
- Completion of preliminary inquiries within 16 weeks of receiving a complaint – benchmark 80%.
- Completion of investigation and preliminary report within 6 months of initiation of an investigation – benchmark 80%.
- Completion of reviews of our decisions within 6 weeks of receipt of request for review – benchmark 80%.

- Recommendation made in connection with a final report following an investigation resulting in a change to policy, procedure or practice – benchmark 70% of reports.
- Recommendations made in connection with a final report following an investigation adopted by the relevant agency or action taken consistent with recommendations – benchmark 80% of recommendations.

Over the next few years, we will also have a series of performance measures for our systemic and project-based work. These also present a range of challenges, including how best to measure success and demonstrate effectiveness.

The integrity and accuracy of the data we keep is crucial to the effectiveness of our work and our ability to monitor our performance. We periodically conduct internal audits of the recording of information on our case management system to check that it is accurate.

Our assessment of complaints and notifications also needs to be sound and consistent. We have systems for consultation and discussion to ensure that the appropriate decision is made at the outset.

We use close supervision and periodic file audits to review the quality and consistency of our work. This helps ensure that the decisions we make are sound and the management of files is efficient and effective.

It is also important that any correspondence and reports we send out are factually accurate and properly reasoned. We have rigorous procedures for supervising, checking and authorising these documents.

We report on our performance in a number of ways. We include a range of indicators in our annual report as well as in the NSW State Budget Papers. We also report internally on our performance at both the individual and division level. We set ourselves targets in areas such as timeliness, outcomes, implementation of our recommendations and complainant satisfaction.