



Statement of Corporate Purpose

2010 . 2012

Ombudsman's message

Our statement of corporate purpose provides a high level overview of what we do and how we do it. It forms the basis for the development of our office's annual strategic plan, as well as business 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 organisations with the opportunity for their staff to undergo training, and
- prepare a range of publications and guidelines on topics such as good administrative practice and complaint handling.

While most of the organisations we deal with are public authorities, some of our work, particularly in employment related child protection, sees us monitoring the actions of private sector organisations.

Early in 2009, we began a major strategic planning process. This led to a comprehensive restructure of the office in October 2009. We also took the opportunity to review our work processes, strengthen our leadership capabilities and develop strategies to better engage with our stakeholders. We consolidated this work in a further planning process in April 2010.

Our strategic plan will ensure that we continue to provide the best possible service to the people of NSW. While many other aspects of the way we do our work may change, I am confident that the core purposes, values and guarantees outlined in this document will remain the same.

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

We are an impartial watchdog body, independent of the government of the day and accountable to the community through the NSW Parliament.

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 NSW Parliament, the government, the community, 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:

1. Help organisations meet their responsibilities and promote improvement of their service delivery.
2. Deal effectively and fairly with complaints and work with organisations to improve their complaint handling systems.
3. Be a leading watchdog agency.
4. 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 where we can
- help those people who need assistance to make a complaint to the Ombudsman, and
- add value through our work.

Our key functions

Our key functions are derived from a number of Acts of Parliament. 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

In order to work efficiently and effectively as an office, 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. These interactions will be guided by our stakeholder engagement plan.

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.

Develop our workforce

To succeed in the future we must have a capable and flexible workforce able to meet emerging challenges with better communication and leadership.

Develop best practice processes

Through strong governance and clear processes, we will continually look for ways of improving the way we do our work.

Outcomes by 2012

These are the four critical outcomes that we will work toward by 2012:

- we address complex, systemic issues in a way that makes an impact
- we are a work focussed organisation with streamlined business processes and staff who are highly responsive to emerging needs
- we are relevant and credible with adequate working capital, and
- we are a knowledge based, contemporary organisation.

Our governance framework

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

We are committed to having the best possible corporate governance framework in place. Having such a system 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.

Through our robust system of corporate governance we are able to assure the Ombudsman, Parliament, government and the public that resources are being effectively used and that stated outcomes are being achieved. Within the limitations of our secrecy provisions, the implementation of our corporate governance policies and strategies as detailed in our corporate governance framework mean that the work of our office is subject to proper scrutiny and that we can be held accountable for our decisions. The management of our office is overseen and driven by the senior officers group (SOG), the division managers group (DMG) and the strategic leadership group (SLG).

The SOG is made up of the Ombudsman, three Deputy Ombudsman, 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.

The SLG is made up of our senior officers, managers, senior staff and staff representatives. The SLG has a central role in the strategic planning process, identifying areas where we have achieved our goals and where we can do more. The group also has a broader ongoing governance role as part of our corporate governance system, helping to keep us accountable against our business plans.

Our business planning framework

Our business planning framework is built around this statement of corporate purpose. The aims outlined in this document then inform our annual strategic plan. This whole of office plan identifies strategies to meet our aims. The annual strategic plan will set the direction for our Branch and Division plans.

Our performance indicators

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 measure our performance against areas such as timeliness, outcomes, implementation of our recommendations and complainant satisfaction.

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.

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.