



Overview

This section provides an executive summary of the Office's performance, general information about the Office and the Office's Performance Management Framework.

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About the Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is an independent and impartial officer who reports directly to Parliament. The Ombudsman receives, investigates and resolves complaints about State Government agencies, local governments and universities, undertakes own motion investigations, reviews certain child deaths, reviews family and domestic violence fatalities and undertakes inspection, monitoring and other functions.

The Ombudsman concurrently holds the roles of Energy and Water Ombudsman and Chair, State Records Commission.

Ombudsman's Overview

The Ombudsman investigates and resolves complaints from Western Australians. In 2019-20, we received 12,560 contacts from Western Australian citizens, comprised of 10,579 enquiries and 1,981 complaints.

Complaints must be resolved effectively and efficiently. In the last year, 95% of complaints were resolved within three months. The average age of complaints as at 30 June 2007 was 173 days. As at 30 June 2020, it is 47 days. In that same time, the cost of resolving complaints has reduced by 37%, from \$2,941 in 2007-08 to \$1,858 in 2019-20.



A vital role undertaken by the Ombudsman is the review of certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities. In 2019-20, we made 16 recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities. Timely review processes have resulted in 60% of all reviews being completed within six months.

At the completion of investigations and reviews the Ombudsman has the power to make recommendations. In 2019-20, for the thirteenth consecutive year, 100% of my recommendations were accepted. Importantly, after making recommendations we report to Parliament on the steps taken to give effect to these recommendations. To this end, in 2019-20, we undertook significant work on 'A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from the Ombudsman's *Investigation into ways that State Government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people 2014*'.

A review of the steps taken to give effect to the recommendations arising from the review of child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities has also been included in this annual report.

The Ombudsman serves all Western Australians living and working in our vast State. To enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, our services by Aboriginal Western Australians and those living or working in the regions, we visited Kalgoorlie and Leonora in December 2019 as well as a range of other engagement and collaboration initiatives.

I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude for the tireless contributions of my outstanding staff team. Their level of professionalism, integrity and commitment to public service continues to be of the very highest order.

The Ombudsman serves Parliament and its Committees. It is a very special honour to serve as an officer of the Parliament and a privilege to present to Parliament the report of our work in 2019-20.

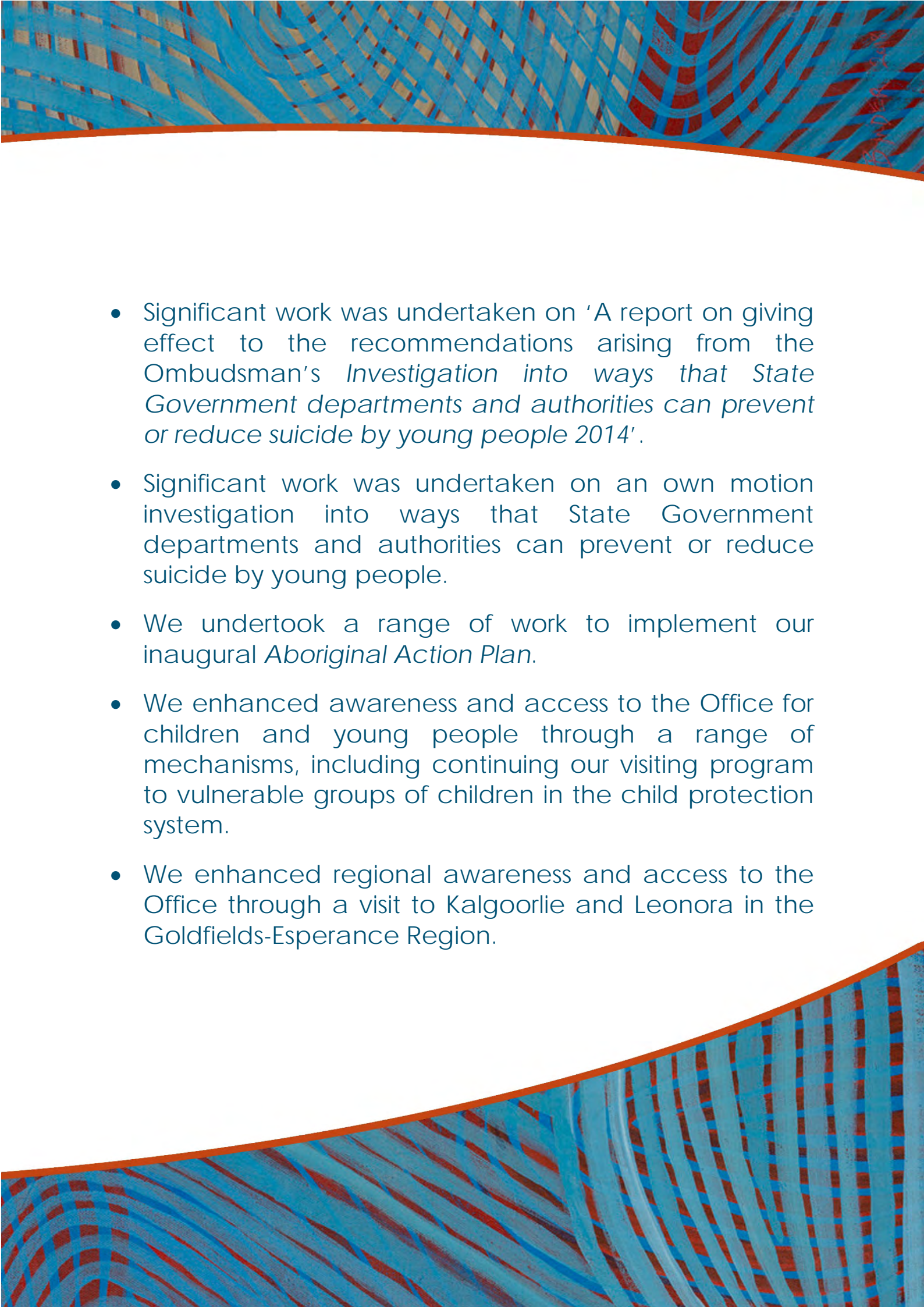
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Field', is positioned above the name and title.

Chris Field
Ombudsman



Year in Brief 2019-20

- We finalised 95% of complaints within 3 months.
- Since 2007, we have:
 - Decreased the age of complaints from 173 days to 47 days; and
 - Reduced the cost of resolving complaints by 37%.
- 100% of our recommendations were accepted for the thirteenth consecutive year.
- We received:
 - 31 investigable child deaths;
 - 15 reviewable family and domestic violence fatalities; and
 - Made 16 recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce these deaths and fatalities.

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- Significant work was undertaken on 'A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from the Ombudsman's *Investigation into ways that State Government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people 2014*'.
 - Significant work was undertaken on an own motion investigation into ways that State Government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people.
 - We undertook a range of work to implement our inaugural *Aboriginal Action Plan*.
 - We enhanced awareness and access to the Office for children and young people through a range of mechanisms, including continuing our visiting program to vulnerable groups of children in the child protection system.
 - We enhanced regional awareness and access to the Office through a visit to Kalgoorlie and Leonora in the Goldfields-Esperance Region.

Operational Structure

The Role of the Ombudsman

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations – more commonly known as the Ombudsman – is an independent and impartial officer of the Western Australian Parliament. The Ombudsman is responsible to the Parliament rather than to the government of the day or a particular Minister. This allows the Ombudsman to be completely independent in undertaking the Ombudsman's functions.

Functions of the Ombudsman

The Office has four principal functions derived from its governing legislation, the [*Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1971*](#), and other legislation, codes or service delivery arrangements.

Principal Functions

<u>Investigating and resolving complaints</u>	Receiving, investigating and resolving complaints about State Government agencies, local governments and universities.
<u>Reviewing certain deaths</u>	Reviewing certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities.
<u>Undertaking own motion investigations and promoting improvements to public administration</u>	Improving public administration for the benefit of all Western Australians through own motion investigations and education and liaison programs with public authorities.
<u>Other functions</u>	Undertaking a range of additional functions, including statutory inspection and monitoring functions.

Other Functions of the Ombudsman

<u>Complaints and appeals by overseas students</u>	Under the relevant national code, the Ombudsman can receive complaints or appeals by overseas students.
<u>Public Interest Disclosures</u>	The Ombudsman can receive disclosures of public interest information relating to matters of administration, and public officers.
<u>Complaints from residents of the Indian Ocean Territories</u>	Under a service delivery arrangement between the Ombudsman and the Australian Government, the Ombudsman can investigate complaints about public authorities in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction that provide services in the Indian Ocean Territories (Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands).
<u>Complaints from persons detained under terrorism legislation</u>	Persons detained under relevant terrorism legislation can make a complaint to the Ombudsman.
<u>Inspection of Telecommunications Interception records</u>	The Ombudsman inspects the records of the Western Australia Police Force and the Corruption and Crime Commission to ascertain the extent of compliance with relevant telecommunications interception legislation.
<u>Energy and Water Ombudsman</u>	The Energy and Water Ombudsman Western Australia resolves complaints about electricity, gas and water services providers. The Ombudsman undertakes the role of the Energy and Water Ombudsman. The costs of the Energy and Water Ombudsman are met by industry members.

A full list of legislation governing these functions can be found in the Appendices Section in [Appendix 2](#).

Our Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

Lawful, reasonable, fair and accountable decision making and practices by public authorities.

Our Mission

To serve Parliament and Western Australians by:

- Receiving, investigating and resolving complaints about State Government agencies, local governments and universities;
- Reviewing certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities;
- Improving public administration for the benefit of all Western Australians through own motion investigations and education and liaison programs with public authorities; and
- Undertaking a range of additional functions, including statutory inspection and monitoring functions.

Our Values

- **Fair:** We observe the requirements of our legislation at all times, use a 'no surprises' approach in all of our work and provide our services equitably to all Western Australians.
- **Independent:** The Ombudsman is an officer of the Parliament, independent of the government of the day and impartial in all of our work.
- **Accountable:** We should be, and are, accountable for our performance and proper expenditure of taxpayers' money. Being accountable means being:
 - **Rigorous:** We undertake work that is important to the community and our decisions are supported by appropriate evidence.
 - **Responsible:** All recommendations for change to public administration are practical and proportionate to the problem identified and have a net public benefit.
 - **Efficient:** We undertake our work in a timely way at least cost. We value working with other agencies that further good public administration but we never duplicate their work.

Our Strategic Focus

- Complaint resolution that is high quality, independent, fair and timely, with an emphasis on early resolution, practical remedies for members of the public and improvements to public administration.
- Improved public administration through own motion investigations, making practical recommendations for improvement and monitoring their implementation.
- Review of certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, identifying patterns and trends and making recommendations to public authorities about ways to prevent or reduce these deaths.
- Inspection of certain records and reports to ensure statutory compliance by the Western Australia Police Force and the Corruption and Crime Commission.
- Collaboration with other Ombudsman and accountability agencies, raising community awareness, making our services accessible and promoting good decision making practices and complaint handling in public authorities.
- Strong and effective governance and attracting, developing and retaining a skilled and valued workforce with a culture that supports high quality, responsive and efficient service.

Management

Management of the Office is undertaken by the Executive Management Group comprised of the Ombudsman, Deputy Ombudsman, Senior Assistant Ombudsman Corporate Services and Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Policy and Projects, National and International Relations, and the Office's Corporate Executive which includes each member of the Executive Management Group and the leaders of the teams in the Office.

The role of the Corporate Executive is to:

- Provide leadership to staff and model the Office's values;
- Set and monitor the strategic direction of the Office and monitor and discuss emerging issues of relevance to the work of the Ombudsman;
- Monitor performance, set priorities and targets for future performance; and
- Ensure compliance with relevant legislation and corporate policies.

For more information, see the [Disclosures and Legal Compliance section](#).

Executive Management

Chris Field Ombudsman

Chris Field is the Western Australian Ombudsman. He concurrently holds the roles of Energy and Water Ombudsman, Chair, State Records Commission and Chair, Accountability Agencies Collaborative Forum.

In February 2020, Chris was elected President of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI). This is the first time in the 42-year history of the IOI that an Australian has been elected President. Chris will commence his term as President at the rescheduled 12th World Conference and General Assembly of the IOI in Dublin, Ireland.

Chris is an Adjunct Professor in the School of Law at the University of Western Australia and founder and co-coordinator of the advanced administrative law subject 'Government Accountability – Law and Practice'. Chris is also the author of a range of publications on administrative law.

He commenced his career as a lawyer at Arthur Robinson and Hedderwicks (now Allens Linklaters), prior to holding the roles of Executive Director, Consumer Law Centre Victoria and Chairman, Australian Consumers' Association (now Choice). Immediately prior to his appointment as Ombudsman, he was an inaugural Member of the Western Australian Economic Regulation Authority. He holds Arts and Law (Honours) degrees.



Mary White

Deputy Ombudsman

Mary was appointed to her current role in April 2014 and concurrently holds the role of Deputy Energy and Water Ombudsman. Prior to her appointment Mary worked in a number of senior executive roles in the Office, from February 2008. Mary has more than 30 years of experience in the public sector, including strategic and corporate leadership roles in line and accountability agencies.



Alan Shaw

Senior Assistant Ombudsman Corporate Services

Alan commenced in his current role in June 2017. He has extensive experience in management roles and has been accountable for strategy and financial, and asset management. He has held a number of senior roles in the Western Australian public sector, Government Trading Enterprises and the not-for-profit sector.



Michelle Bovill

Senior Assistant Ombudsman Complaint Resolution

Michelle joined the Office in 2007 and commenced in her current role in September 2016. Prior to this, she worked in a number of roles in complaint resolution and executive services including as an Assistant Ombudsman from 2015. She has more than 20 years of public sector experience in investigations and complaint handling.



Belinda West

Senior Assistant Ombudsman

Own Motion Investigations and Monitoring

Belinda joined the Office in 2008 and commenced in her current role in March 2020. Prior to this, Belinda was an Assistant Ombudsman from 2014. She has more than 25 years of experience working in the public sector in financial and performance auditing and leadership roles in both line and accountability agencies.



Natarlie De Cinque

Senior Assistant Ombudsman

Reviews

Natarlie joined the Office in 2009 and commenced in her current role in July 2019. Prior to this, Natarlie was an Assistant Ombudsman from 2016. She has worked in the State public sector for over 20 years, and has extensive experience working with the issues of child safety and wellbeing, and family and domestic violence.



Rebecca Poole

Assistant Ombudsman

Strategic Policy and Projects, National and International Relations

Rebecca joined the Office in 2006 and commenced in her current role in June 2018. Prior to this, she was a Director from 2017. She has extensive experience managing strategic research, policy and projects and intergovernmental and international engagement on issues of good governance.



Marcus Claridge

Assistant Ombudsman

Energy and Water

Marcus joined the Office in 2011 and commenced in his current role in April 2018. Prior to this, Marcus was Director, Energy and Water Ombudsman and has worked in other investigatory roles. Marcus has over 30 years of regulatory and investigations experience, both within Australia and Asia.



Paula Parentich

Assistant Ombudsman

Investigations

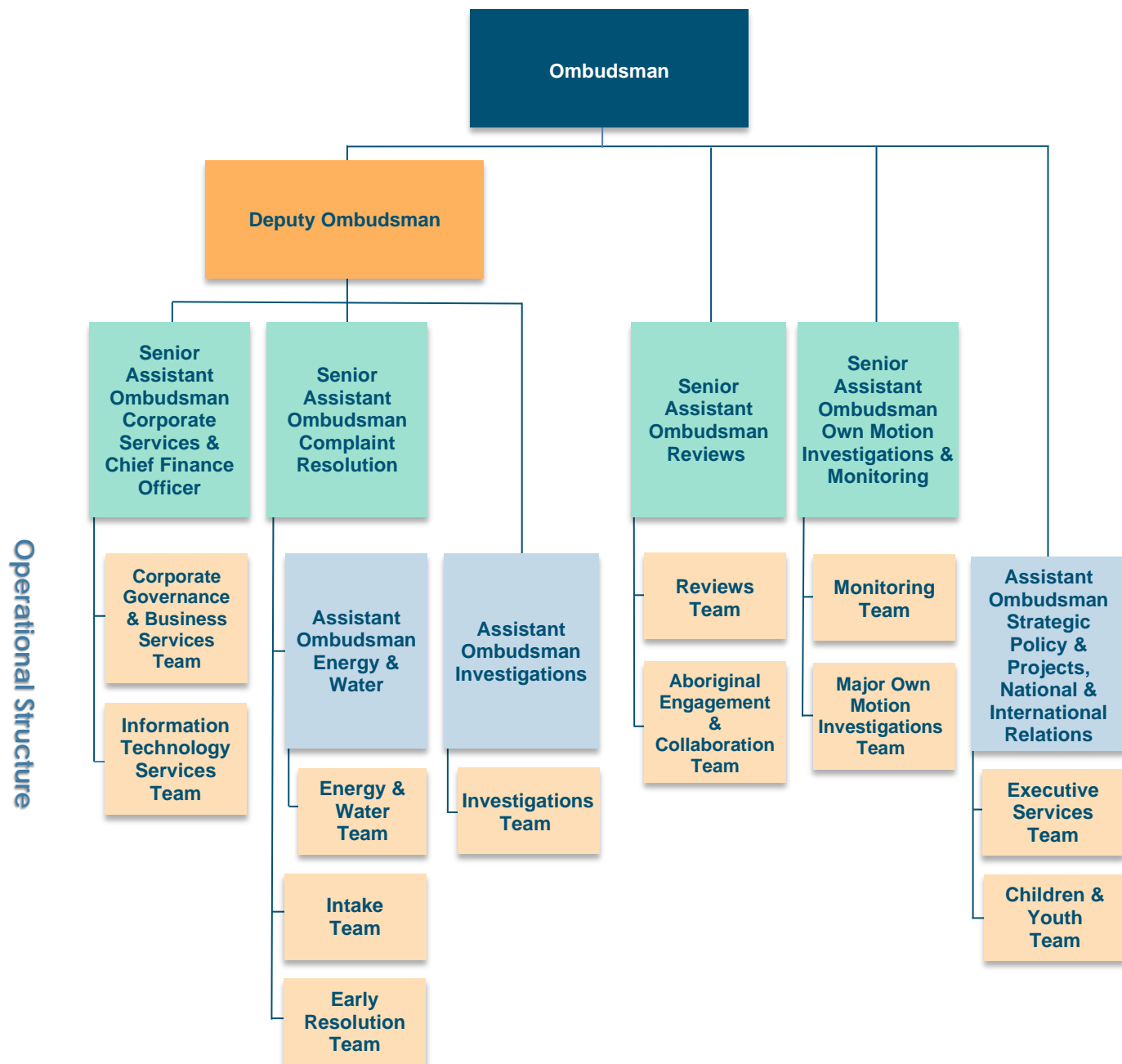
Paula commenced with the Office in her current role in October 2016. She has been a legal practitioner for over 20 years, working in the Commonwealth and State public sectors, and in the non-government sector.



In 2020-21, the Ombudsman will create and advertise a critical new executive position, Senior Assistant Ombudsman Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration.

Our Structure and Teams

Organisational Structure as at 30 June 2020



Team Responsibilities

- The **Complaint Resolution Team** includes the Intake Team and the Early Resolution Team and has responsibility for handling enquiries, receiving and assessing complaints, and undertaking the early resolution of complaints, where appropriate, through informal investigations.
- The **Major Own Motion Investigations Team** undertakes own motion investigations and other strategies aimed at improving public administration.
- The **Reviews Team** reviews certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, identifies patterns and trends arising from these reviews and makes recommendations to relevant public authorities to prevent or reduce these deaths.
- The **Investigations Team** handles the investigation of complaints.
- The **Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration Team** provides expert advice and support to each of the Ombudsman's functions including continuing to promote high levels of awareness and accessibility for Aboriginal Western Australians to the Office.
- The **Monitoring Team** undertakes inspections of telecommunications interception records.
- The **Energy and Water Team** has responsibility for handling enquiries and receiving, investigating and resolving complaints about electricity, gas and water services providers.
- The **Corporate Governance and Business Services** and **Information Technology Services Teams** support the Office in providing corporate communications, governance, business services, internal audit and integrity of corporate services.
- The **Executive Services** and **Children and Youth Teams** are responsible for strategic research, policy and projects, national and international relations, strategic and corporate communications, executive services and services for children and youth.

Performance Management Framework

The Ombudsman's performance management framework is consistent with the Government goal of *Strong Communities: Safe communities and supported families*.

Desired Outcomes of the Ombudsman's Office

The public sector of Western Australia is accountable for, and is improving the standard of, administrative decision making, practices and conduct.



Key Effectiveness Indicators

- Where the Ombudsman made recommendations to improve practices or procedures, the percentage of recommendations accepted by agencies.
- Number of improvements to practices or procedures as a result of Ombudsman action.

Service Provided by the Ombudsman's Office

Resolving complaints about decision making of public authorities and improving the standard of public administration.



Key Efficiency Indicators

- Percentage of allegations finalised within three months.
- Percentage of allegations finalised within 12 months.
- Percentage of allegations on hand at 30 June less than three months old.
- Percentage of allegations on hand at 30 June less than 12 months old.
- Average cost per finalised allegation.
- Average cost per finalised notification of death.
- Cost of monitoring and inspection functions.