



Significant Issues Impacting the Office



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Significant Issues Impacting the Office

The significant issues affecting the Office are:

- The increased level of complaints that commenced in 2009-10 has continued in 2011-12. Managing the workload associated with the increased complaints continues to be a key issue for the Office.
- The Office undertakes own motion investigations aimed at improving administration across the public sector. In 2011-12, the Office tabled in Parliament a report of an own motion investigation into planning for children in the care of the Chief Executive Officer of the Department for Child Protection. The report contained 23 recommendations designed to improve planning for children in care, all of which were agreed to by government agencies.
- The Office seeks to enhance accessibility of its services by Indigenous and regional Western Australians through a range of strategies, including the Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program. The Office also continues to engage effectively with public authorities to strengthen their capacity in complaint handling and decision making through a range of mechanisms including guidelines, workshops and the development of new products.
- The Office undertakes a diversity of functions in addition to handling complaints about public authorities and seeking to improve public administration. In recent years, the trend has been for an increasing range of functions to be undertaken by the Office.

Increased Demand for Complaint Resolution Services

Complaint numbers continue at the increased levels that commenced in 2009-10. Overall, the Office has experienced an 83 per cent increase in the average number of complaints received in the last three years (2009-10 to 2011-12), compared to the average for the previous three years (2006-07 to 2008-09).

The Office has managed the increased workload associated with the higher levels of complaint numbers through the Office's complaint handling improvement program, combined with a focus on early resolution of complaints and economies of scale and scope arising from new functions as well as efficiencies from existing management, corporate and administration functions of the Office.

This year the Office has developed and commenced a new organisational structure and processes to further promote early resolution and this will be a principal area of focus in 2012-13.

Own Motion Investigations

One of the ways that the Office endeavours to improve public administration is to undertake investigations of systemic and thematic patterns and trends arising from complaints made to the Ombudsman and from the review of investigable child deaths. These investigations are referred to as own motion investigations.

Own motion investigations are intended to result in improvements to public administration that are evidence-based, proportionate, practical and consider the costs, as well as the benefits, of proposed improvements.

In 2011-12, the Office tabled in Parliament a report of an own motion investigation into planning for children in the care of the Chief Executive Officer of the Department for Child Protection. The report contained 23 recommendations designed to improve planning for children in care, all of which were agreed to by the agencies involved. The Office has commenced monitoring of the implementation and effectiveness of these recommendations.

Significant work was also done on an own motion investigation relating to deaths of infants that are sleep related.

Providing Access to Ombudsman Services

The Office seeks to ensure its services are accessible to all Western Australians, with a particular focus on Indigenous and regional Western Australians, through a range of strategies including the Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program. This program involves a range of activities for the community and public authorities including seminars and workshops, visits to regional prisons, workshops for community groups and Indigenous people and complaint clinics.

Increasing Diversity of Functions

In recent years the Office has increased the diversity of functions it undertakes. These include a child death review function, an inspection function for telecommunications interception activities, dealing with complaints from overseas students about the termination of their enrolment and undertaking the role of the Western Australian Energy Ombudsman.

From 1 July 2012, the Office will commence a further new function, to review family and domestic violence fatalities and in 2011-12 the Office undertook considerable work to establish the framework for the new role.

An additional function to be undertaken by the Office arises from the *Criminal Code Amendment (Infringement Notices) Act 2011* (the Act). The Act introduces a new scheme into Western Australia for the issue of Criminal Penalty Infringement Notices by Western Australia Police for certain offences.