

Newsletter of the Western Australian Ombudsman



Edition 11 - July 2011

In this issue...

Integrity in decision making: Integrity Coordinating Group Forum 2011	1
Message from the Ombudsman	2
Cover story cont.	2
Own motion investigation into the management of personal information	3
New Graduate Officer	4
Ombudsman staff member wins scholarship	4
Outreach to the Indian Ocean Territories	5
Ombudsman addresses Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman's Conference	6
Visit from New Zealand Ombudsman colleagues	6
Hints and Tips – Responding to complaints	7
Ombudsman's office wins two Lonnie Awards	8

Integrity in decision making

Integrity Coordinating Group Forum 2011

Integrity in decision making was the theme of the Integrity Coordinating Group (ICG) Forum 2011 held on 16 June. The Forum was a joint initiative of the ICG, a group of independent officers who collaborate to promote and strengthen integrity in Western Australian public bodies. The ICG is comprised of the Public Sector Commissioner, the Auditor General, the Corruption and Crime Commissioner, the Western Australian Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner.

Around 200 Chief Executive Officers, senior executive staff and those involved with promoting integrity in public bodies had the opportunity to listen to the ICG members' perspectives on integrity in decision making, and to discuss integrity issues more generally with the member bodies and each other. The ICG also launched its new product, *Integrity in Decision Making*.

The Western Australian Ombudsman, and current ICG Chair, Chris Field, said the Forum presented an important opportunity for the ICG to collaborate with each other, and public authorities, to enhance the quality of decision making.

"Integrity in decision making is a topic which is not just relevant to every ICG member, but also of critical day to day importance to all of us who serve the public interest."

"Ensuring integrity in decision making increases confidence in the decision making process, reduces complaints about decisions and strengthens trust in the public sector. Ultimately, decision making characterised by integrity best serves the public interest," Mr Field said.

During the Forum, the ICG members spoke about their roles in relation to decision making, why integrity is important and shared their insights and observations based on their experiences.

Attendees gave extremely positive feedback with 96 per cent very satisfied or satisfied with the overall quality of the Forum and relevance of the content, and around 90 per cent satisfied with the practical advice, publications and resources provided.

"Integrity in decision making is a topic which is not just relevant to every ICG member, but also of critical day to day importance to all of us who serve the public interest."



ICG Forum 2011.

Continued on page 2

Message from the Ombudsman

In this edition, you can find information on the recent Integrity Coordinating Group Forum 2011. The theme for this year's Forum was integrity in decision making, a topic of particular interest to many in the sector, as evidenced by the attendance of around 200 senior public officers from State Government agencies, local governments and universities. The event was very successful and I would like to acknowledge the work of the organising committee comprised of senior staff from all of the Integrity Coordinating Group member agencies.



An overview of our most recent own motion investigation report about the management of personal information by public sector agencies is also featured. I am pleased to say that we found that agencies generally had good practices for handling personal information, but we also identified opportunities for improvement. Importantly, we have also developed a self-assessment checklist to assist public authorities to manage the collection and storage of personal information effectively.

You can also meet our new Graduate Officer, Lindon McKenna, and read about one of our staff members, Rebecca Poole, being awarded a scholarship by Chartered Secretaries Australia. On page 5 you can read about our visit to the Indian Ocean Territories.

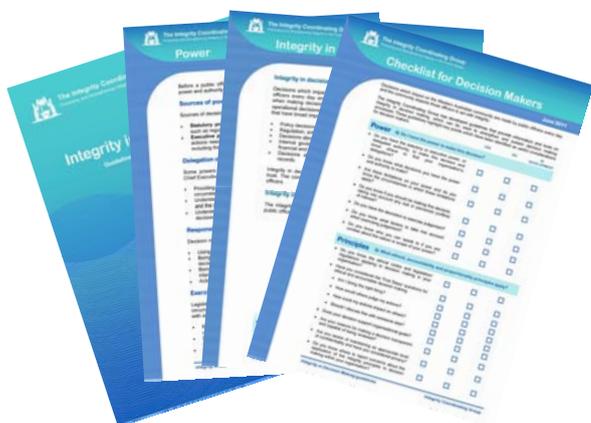
You can also read about the recent WA Lonnie Awards where we were very pleased to be presented with two awards. Our office received the 'Public Sector Commission's specialist award for Good Governance' and the 'Bronze Award for Agencies with less than 100 FTE.' The awards recognise and celebrate excellence in annual reporting in the Western Australian public sector.

You may also have noticed our new newsletter design in this edition. We have refreshed our look after 10 editions and added more stories about our work and our staff to keep you updated and informed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Field'.

Chris Field

Integrity Coordinating Group Forum 2011 (cont)



The ICG's new product, *Integrity in Decision Making* was launched at the Forum. The product includes an *Integrity in Decision Making Framework* which covers four key elements for decision making: power; principles; proper process; and proportionate outcomes. Also incorporated into the package is a series of practical guides around each element along with checklists that can be used by individual decision makers and agencies. The product is available on the ICG website at www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/icg.

"The guidelines bring together the combined experience of the ICG members and reinforce key messages provided at the Forum. I encourage all public sector leaders to make use of this new resource," said Mr Field.



Own motion investigation into the management of personal information

One of the ways that the office of the Ombudsman endeavours to improve public administration is to undertake investigations that are based on the patterns, trends and themes that arise from our resolution of individual complaints. 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.

The Ombudsman's most recent own motion investigation report, *The management of personal information – good practice and opportunities for improvement (the Report)*, was released on 28 March 2011.

The management of personal information investigation

The management of personal information investigation considered how selected Western Australian State Government agencies that deal with large amounts of personal information collect, disclose and share that information. This topic was selected for an own motion investigation as alleged inaccuracy and inappropriate use of personal information by public authorities has been an ongoing source of complaints to the Ombudsman.

The investigation aimed to determine how effectively selected agencies were managing personal information, and to identify good practices and learning opportunities that would benefit the public sector as a whole.

A series of agreed good practice principles, shown to the right, were used to assess the way in which selected agencies were managing the personal information they collect and hold. These principles were based on national and state legislative requirements, agency-specific legislation and internationally accepted good practice.

Outcomes of the investigation

Ombudsman Chris Field said that observations made during the investigation were generally pleasing.

“We observed many good practices regarding the management of personal information in these agencies, but we also identified areas for improvement which are outlined in the Report. In light of the agreed good practice principles, and combined with the good practices and opportunities for improvement observed during the investigation, we have developed a self-assessment checklist for use by public sector agencies,” Mr Field said.

The checklist is designed to assist State Government agencies:

- To consider their own management of personal information against commonly accepted principles; and
- If required, to identify aspects of their own management of personal information that do not meet the principles and therefore represent opportunities for improvement.

The Report, which includes the checklist, can be accessed from the Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/managingpersonalinfo

Best practice principles for managing personal information

1. Collection
2. Use
3. Accuracy
4. Disclosure
5. Storage and security
6. Responsibility for the actions of service providers
7. Access and correction
8. Transparency



New Graduate Officer

In January this year, the Ombudsman's office appointed a Graduate Officer who is undertaking a program of six-monthly placements with members of the Integrity Coordinating Group (**ICG**). The program includes placements with the offices of the Public Sector Commissioner, Auditor General, Corruption and Crime Commissioner and the Western Australian Ombudsman. Lindon McKenna was selected from a large field of university graduates for the position.

Ombudsman Chris Field said that the graduate program was an important initiative. "It is a very positive opportunity to develop outstanding graduates within the well-developed and well-regarded integrity and accountability framework in Western Australia."

Lindon said he was enthusiastic about the opportunities and challenges he will face over the next two years.

"This position means I will be able to gain a wide range of experience in different integrity and accountability agencies," Lindon said.

Lindon will be working on ICG projects as well as agency-specific projects during each rotation. He is currently working with the Office of the Auditor General.



Ombudsman staff member wins scholarship

In March 2011, Acting Director Access and Resolution, Rebecca Poole, was awarded a Public Sector Scholarship from Chartered Secretaries Australia (**CSA**). This is the first year the CSA has awarded scholarships to talented public sector staff who are making a difference in the Australian public sector.

The scholarship allows Rebecca to study CSA's higher education accredited Graduate Diploma of Applied Corporate Governance at no cost. The course includes public sector-specific subjects in applied administrative law and public sector accountability and transparency.



Of her achievement, Rebecca says, "It will enhance my skills to carry out my work at the Ombudsman's office and give me new perspectives in governance practices relevant to today's public sector."

The office congratulates Rebecca on this achievement.



Outreach to the Indian Ocean Territories



L-R: Director, Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, Anne Donaldson; Senior Investigating Officer, Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office, Sandra Pelham; and Western Australian Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Services, Mary White.

From 12 to 19 April, officers from the Western Australian Ombudsman's office, along with staff from the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office and the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, visited the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT). The team spent time on both the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and on Christmas Island.

Under an arrangement with the Commonwealth Government, the Western Australian Ombudsman handles complaints from people in the IOT about Western Australian public authorities which are within the Western Australian Ombudsman's jurisdiction and operate in the IOT.

The visit aimed to raise awareness of, and access to, the services of the accountability and complaint resolution agencies for people living and working in the IOT.

Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Services, Mary White said, "The visit was invaluable in providing information to the Government agencies operating in the IOT and talking directly with the community."

The visits included meetings and discussions with local governments on both islands and the IOT administration team. Meetings were also held with local schools and hospitals. Staff engaged with key community groups and strengthened their understanding of the economic and cultural diversity in the island communities.

On working collaboratively with the other accountability agencies on the visit, Mary said that the cooperation enhanced the experience for the community and agencies alike.

"Efficient and effective service delivery on the islands relies on the local, State and Commonwealth jurisdictions working together. Having both State and Commonwealth accountability agencies on hand to answer questions and share their perspectives ensured maximum benefit for everyone concerned."

Mary added, "Overall, the visit was an important way for us to provide direct access to our services for people living in the IOT, and broaden our understanding about issues facing people in the region."



L-R: Senior Investigating Officer, Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office, Sandra Pelham; Director, Indian Ocean Territories Administration, Department of Regional Australia, Catherine Wildermuth; Director, Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, Anne Donaldson; Indian Ocean Territories Administrator, Department of Regional Australia, Brian Lacy; and Western Australian Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Services, Mary White.

Ombudsman addresses Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman's Conference

In March 2011, the Ombudsman addressed the 26th Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region (APOR) Conference in Taipei, Taiwan. This was also an important opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with Ombudsmen from other countries in the region.

The Conference theme was 'The Ombudsman and Human Rights: Protecting Human Rights and Promoting Good Governance.' The Ombudsman presented a paper titled, *The Ombudsman and the Constitution of Liberty* that discussed the importance of liberty, the role of the Ombudsman in safeguarding liberty, the office of the Ombudsman and the rule of law and the need to consider the relationship between liberty and personal responsibility in the work of the office of the Ombudsman.

Ombudsman Chris Field said that the APOR Conference provided insight on how jurisdictions with different social, cultural and economic environments approach issues.

"These meetings provide an opportunity to consider issues facing Ombudsmen in our region and hear a variety of valuable opinions and perspectives about the most effective way to respond to these issues," Mr Field said.



Western Australian Ombudsman, Chris Field speaking at the APOR Conference.

Photograph courtesy of Control Yuan

Visit from New Zealand Ombudsman colleagues



Clockwise from back left: Western Australian Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Services, Mary White; Western Australian Deputy Ombudsman, Dr Peter Wilkins; New Zealand Deputy Ombudsman, Leo Donnelly; Western Australian Ombudsman, Chris Field; and New Zealand Assistant Ombudsman, Bridget Hewson.

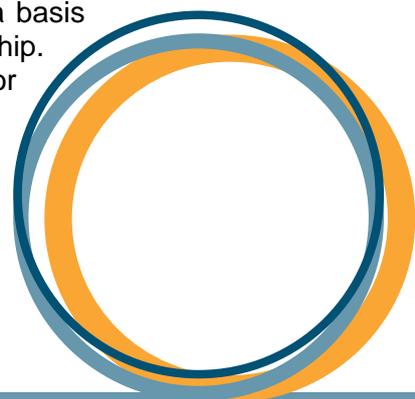
Our office hosted a visit from our New Zealand colleagues over two days in February.

Deputy Ombudsman, Leo Donnelly, and Assistant Ombudsman, Bridget Hewson, travelled to Western Australia to find out more about how the Western Australian Ombudsman's office works, and how the office's processes might translate to New Zealand, in particular the success the Western Australian Ombudsman's office has achieved in terms of early resolution of complaints and timeliness of complaint handling generally.

Western Australian Deputy Ombudsman, Dr Peter Wilkins, and Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Services, Mary White, along with other staff held meetings with our New Zealand colleagues to discuss issues such as training and staff development, the office's assessment and investigation processes, our online complaint handling toolkit, and outreach strategies.

Dr Wilkins said that the meeting established a basis for an ongoing, information sharing relationship.

"The information exchanged was valuable for both parties. As discussions progressed we were able to see that their experiences were very similar to ours and we could learn a lot from each other," Dr Wilkins observed.



This is the second of our three-part *Hints and Tips* series focusing on the three key steps that cover the 10 good practice principles for effective complaint handling in public sector agencies and local government. The three steps are:

Step 1: Enabling complaints

Step 2: Responding to complaints

Step 3: Accountability and learning

The principles and tips for step 2 are featured here.

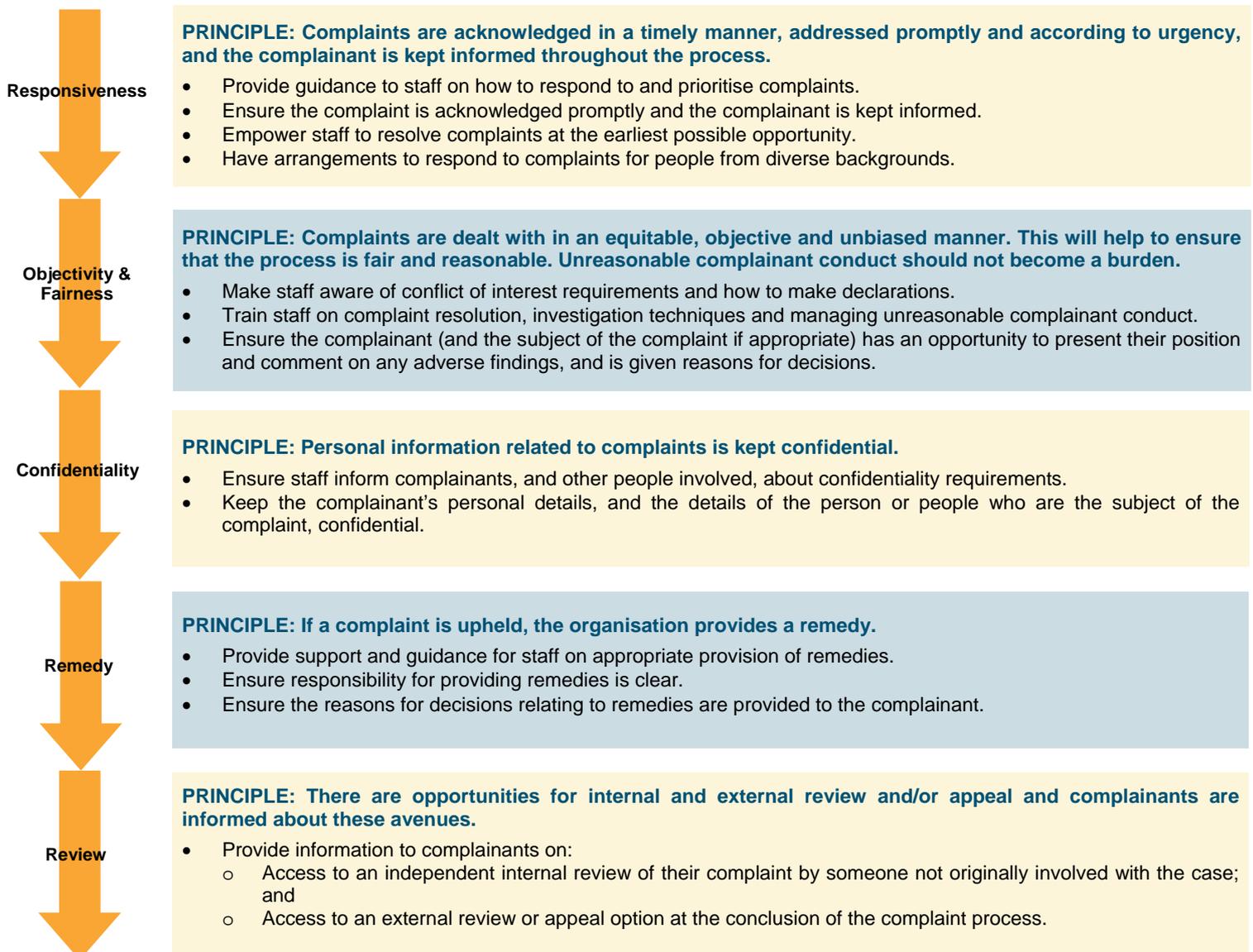
See [Edition 10](#) for Step 1 hints and tips.

Step 3 will be in our next edition.

Hints and Tips

Step 2: Responding to complaints

Complaints should be responded to promptly and handled objectively, fairly and confidentially. Remedies should be provided where complaints are upheld and there should be a system for review.



Ombudsman's office wins two Lonnie Awards

At the recent W.S. Lonnie Awards, the Ombudsman's office was recognised in two categories for its 2009-10 Annual Report. The Office of the Western Australian Ombudsman was awarded a Bronze Lonnie in the 'Less than 100 FTE' category and the Public Sector Commission's specialist award for Good Governance.

The awards recognise and celebrate excellence in annual reporting in the Western Australian public sector. All annual reports compiled by agencies within the sector are eligible to win a Lonnie Award.

Ombudsman Chris Field said that it was very pleasing to be recognised as having a good practice annual report.

"Annual reporting in the public sector is a key way agencies can demonstrate they are accountable to the Parliament and the public," Mr Field said. "In particular, the Ombudsman, as an officer of the Parliament, should and does pay particular attention to the quality of the office's annual reports."



L-R: Director Research and Projects, Sarah Cowie; Western Australian Ombudsman, Chris Field; Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Services, Mary White; and Communications Manager, Janelle Walker with the office's Lonnie Awards.

Ombudsman Western Australia

Contact Us

To subscribe to this newsletter or give feedback on its contents, email newsletter@ombudsman.wa.gov.au

Level 12
44 St Georges Tce
PERTH
WA 6000

PO Box Z5386
St Georges Tce
PERTH
WA 6831

Telephone: (08) 9220 7555 or 1800 117 000 (free call)

Facsimile: (08) 9325 1107

Email: mail@ombudsman.wa.gov.au

Web: www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au