Creating an effective complaints management process

Background

Under the *Local Government Act 2009* and the *Local Government Regulation 2012*, all councils are required to have an effective administrative action complaints process.

As part of its administrative improvement role, the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman reviews the complaint management systems (CMS) of public agencies. The objective is to help agencies develop effective processes to handle complaints.

In July 2012, this Office launched a review of agency complaints processes. Nineteen councils were selected for the first phase of the review: six metropolitan councils, seven regional councils and six shire councils.

The reviews considered seven key elements of a CMS:

1. policy and procedures
2. external visibility and accessibility
3. internal communication and training
4. complaints resolution
5. internal reporting
6. monitoring effectiveness
7. external reporting.

The reviews measured compliance with:

- Local Government Act 2009 (LGA) s.268
- Local Government (Operations) Regulation 2010 (LGOR) s.119
- Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010 (LGFPRR) s.115.

Outcome

Overall, the reviews found that councils had revised and improved their complaints management processes. However, the reviews identified the following areas of concern:

- recognition, capture, recording and reporting of administrative action complaints
- visibility and accessibility of complaints information on council websites.
- communication and training about the CMS.
- acknowledgement, internal reporting and final responses to complainants.
- internal reporting and analysis of complaints data to identify trends and improvements
- regular reviews of CMS effectiveness
- annual reporting on the operation of the CMS.

Making a difference

At the end of each review, councils received an audit report containing recommendations. Common recommendations from the reviews are available online.

The Office has also produced a series of fact sheets on good complaints management, available online.