

Media release - Management of child safety complaints – second report

2 April 2020

Ombudsman reports on the management of child safety complaints

The Queensland Ombudsman's report, *Management of child safety complaints – second report: An investigation into the management of child safety complaints within the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women*, was today tabled by the Honourable Curtis Pitt MP, Speaker of the Queensland Parliament.

This report follows an earlier Ombudsman investigation into the then Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services' (now the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women) management of child safety complaints. While the 2016 investigation focused on the accuracy of the then department's complaints data, this investigation focused on how the department manages child safety complaints and its interaction with the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG).

The department's complaints management system is crucial to ensuring any clients' concerns with the actions and decisions of the department in administering Queensland's child protection system can be raised and rectified appropriately. This investigation found that the current complaints management system is not an effective mechanism to rectify poor decision-making or improve business practices.

The investigation identified concerns about the accessibility of the department's complaints management system. The department's attempts to locally resolve clients' concerns, before classifying them as a complaint, often resulted in a drawn-out cycle of interactions with agency officers without effective resolution.

Further, the department miscategorised many complaints as 'case issues' rather than complaints. This often resulted in a frustrating cycle of interactions for the department's clients before their concerns were responded to as a complaint.

"As a result of the failures in its complaints handling, the department is almost certainly under-reporting its child safety complaints and is potentially wasting resources through duplication of effort," said Mr Clarke.

Even when a client's concerns were handled as a complaint, the department's complaints handling process was unnecessarily complex and confusing. This resulted in frustration, delay, and a lack of clarity about the outcome of the complaint.

Decision-making in the management of complaints was a key concern identified in the investigation. A lack of clarity about how a decision should be made and who should be the decision-maker has resulted in poor outcomes for complainants.

The department has also failed to maintain a meaningful reporting framework to identify systemic issues in complaints management and child safety administrative decisions generally. This undermines a key benefit of effective complaints management, to identify improvements to current practices and uncover problematic patterns in administrative decisions.

The OPG refers child safety related complaints received by its Community Visitors to the department. The 2016 investigation identified a need for better coordination between the OPG and the department. While both agencies have taken steps towards better coordination, further steps are required.

The availability of accessible, fair and efficient complaints handling is critical to the proper operation of the child safety system in Queensland. The department's current complaints management system is not meeting that need. This report makes recommendations aimed at assisting the department to implement best practice across all facets of

complaints management.

About the Ombudsman

The Queensland Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Parliament.

The Ombudsman ensures public agencies make fair and balanced decisions for Queenslanders by investigating complaints and conducting own-initiative investigations that tackle broader, systemic concerns.

The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about state government departments, local councils and publicly-funded universities.

The Ombudsman can make recommendations to rectify unfair or unjust decisions and improve administrative practice.

The report

[View the full report](#): *Management of child safety complaints – second report: An investigation into the management of child safety complaints within the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.*

Key facts

- The Queensland Ombudsman's report, Management of child safety complaints – second report: An investigation into the management of child safety complaints within the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, was tabled on 2 April by the Honourable Curtis Pitt MP, Speaker of the Queensland Parliament.
- The current complaints management system is not an effective mechanism to rectify poor decision making or improve business practices. It is unnecessarily complex and confusing, resulting in frustration and delay:
 - the department's attempts to locally resolve client concerns, before classifying them as a complaint, often resulted in a drawn-out cycle of interactions without reaching a resolution
 - there was miscategorisation of many complaints as 'case issues' rather than complaints
 - even when a client's concerns were categorised as a complaint, the department's process was unnecessarily complex and frustrating
 - there was a lack of clarity about how decisions about complaints should be

made and who should be the decision-maker which has resulted in poor outcomes for complainants

- there was a lack of a meaningful reporting framework to identify systemic issues within complaints.
- This report follows on from the Ombudsman's 2016 report, Management of child safety complaints report: An investigation into the current child safety complaints management processes within the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, July 2016.
- The Office of the Public Guardian and the department have taken steps towards better coordination, however further steps are required.
- This report makes recommendations aimed at assisting the department to implement best practice across all facets of complaints management.

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