

When to use Ombudsman service

The Ombudsman is an independent body that assists people to deal with government agencies, such as departments, ministries, crown entities, district health boards, state-owned enterprises, tertiary education institutions and school boards of trustees.

The Ombudsman also deals with protected disclosures/whistleblowing and monitoring places of detention.

It oversees the implementation of the United Nations Disabilities Convention.

The Ombudsman cannot investigate Government ministers or the police (except regarding Official Information requests), courts, tribunals or full local council decisions but can look at advice given to ministers and councils by officials.

If you have an issue you should first try to resolve your complaint through the agency's own dispute resolution process. If it does not have one, you should write to the



LEGAL MATTERS

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chief executive. The Ombudsman may refuse to investigate your complaint if you have an alternative remedy available, the issue is too old (over 12 months), is trivial or vexatious, or if you do not have sufficient personal interest in the matter.

The Ombudsman deals with the Official Information Act and the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act. You can request information held by ministers plus central and local government agencies.

Official information is that held by the agency, such as reports,

documents, recordings and official memories (even if not written down), reasons for decisions, manuals, agendas and minutes of meetings.

Anyone can apply for local government information, but to apply for central government information you must be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident and in New Zealand.

Companies registered or located in New Zealand can also request information.

Your request for information must be responded to within 20 working days (with extensions for large volumes of material or consultations required).

Official information should be made available to you unless there is a good reason to withhold the information and those reasons are set out in the Acts.

If release of information is refused, you must be told the reason. If you have requested information from an agency you can ask the Ombudsman to investigate the agency's decisions, actions or inactions.

There is no set form for a complaint, but there is an online complaint form on the Ombudsman's website you may use.

Once your complaint is received, the Ombudsman's office will acknowledge it and make informal inquiries to attempt a resolution.

If it decides to formally investigate, it will seek a response from the agency and view any withheld information.

It may also consult other agencies, such as the Privacy Commissioner.

The Ombudsman will form a provisional opinion and give you and the agency an opportunity to comment.

A final recommendation or decision will be

made and it is binding on the agency (subject to powers of veto by Cabinet and councils).

If you need help with your complaint to the Ombudsman, you can contact its office. In some instances you may also wish to seek legal assistance.

If the Ombudsman decides to recommend the release of information, it is up to the agency to release that information (not the Ombudsman's office).

Column courtesy of Rainey Collins Lawyers phone 0800 733 484. If you have an inquiry, email aknowsley@raineycollins.co.nz

THE LOWDOWN

EXHIBITIONS

Pataka Museum, Parumoana St. A Clear Day, a Karl Maughan exhibition, till Feb 8. Jeweller Matthew McIntyre Wilson exhibition, intricate woven kete (baskets), kōwhiri (cloaks) and tūtae (belts) from fine copper and silver wire, till Feb 8. **Ko e Hāa Hangatone: The Straight Path** - New Zealand artist Robin White has collaborated with Tongan artist Ruita Filia to create a large installation of ngatū (painted tape), till March 8. **The 25th Wallace Art Awards** - Pataka is hosting the touring awards winners and finalists, till February 8. **In Bloom** - more than 20 Porirua schools have participated in a project developed by the Pataka education team to fill the gallery with flowers, till January 25. Also a weekend workshop with Michel Turfery and Rot, January 24 and 25, 10am till 4pm. The

workshop will be a mix of traditional woodblock techniques with stencil cutting and spray painting.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Te Rauaparaha Arena, Parumoana St. North City Wedding and Bridal Expo, Jan 25, 10am till 3.30pm, Wellington's largest regional expo, with more than \$50,000 in prizes. More than 200 dresses on sale. **Battle Hill Farm, Poutāhuna, East.** Drink & Be Crafty. Homemade crafts, fantastic food, specialty beers, sack and egg and spoon races, live music, Jan 24, 10am till 4pm. Etipoo available. **Wellington Community Park, Warspite Ave.** Family fun day, Jan 22, from noon. Tug-o-war, skipping, haka, big screen movie, farm animals, DJ, free barbeque and more. **Te Rauaparaha Park, Norion St.** Festival of the Elements,

Feb 6. Music, food, activities, exhibitions and more. **Cannons Creek Park, Warspite Ave.** Creekfest 2015, March 14, 9am till 6pm. Food, music, sport, information and entertainment.

SPORT

Hutt Recreation Ground, Bellevue St. Lower Hutt, North City v Hutt District, Hazlett Trophy premier cricket, day two of two, Jan 24, from 11am. **Porirua Grand Traverse,** multisport event for the serious athletes and a family fun run, April 12.

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Duration: 24 weeks Date: May 2015 Fees: No Fees

*Evening classes offered in Porirua
- Certificate in Computing - Level 2**
 Including the National Certificate in Computing (Level 2)

Duration: 18 weeks Date: March 2015 Fees: No Fees

*Entry criteria applies - day classes offered in Lower Hutt and Porirua
- Certificate in Computing - Level 2 & 3**
 Including the National Certificate in Computing (Level 2 & 3)

Duration: 2 days a week, 36 weeks Date: March 2015 Fees: No Fees

*Entry criteria applies - evening classes offered in Lower Hutt and Porirua

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