

Ombudsman caseload reaches historic high in 2019-20 (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, presented to the public today (July 8) the 2019-20 Annual Report of the Office of The Ombudsman. The Office has seen a huge surge in the number of complaints received, almost quadrupling the figure in the previous year.

"Many a time, hundreds and thousands of complaints would fill our inbox instantly after an incident. To cope with this unprecedented phenomenon and workload, we had to devise new measures and procedures. And faced with heightened emotions from left, right and centre, we have to be extra vigilant to maintain our impartiality and professionalism," Ms Chiu said.

The Office received 19 767 complaints in 2019-20, up by 296 per cent over the 4 991 complaints received last year. Among the complaints received, there were 15 034 secondary cases in topical complaints, which was also a historic high. The Office completed processing 19 838 (95.7 per cent) of all cases, including those brought forward from the previous year. After assessment, 17 031 complaints were closed due to insufficient grounds to pursue or for jurisdictional or legal restriction reasons, and 2 807 complaints were pursued and concluded.

Of the 240 cases concluded by way of full investigation, 152 (63.3 per cent) were substantiated, partially substantiated or unsubstantiated but other inadequacies were found. Among the 2 418 inquiry cases concluded, inadequacies or deficiencies were found in 369 (15 per cent). Meanwhile, the Office completed 10 direct investigations in the year.

Despite the unprecedented influx of complaints, the Office continued to be able to meet the targets of its service standard in processing of complaints, with 93.5 per cent of pursued cases concluded within three months and 99.3 per cent concluded within six months.

During the year, the Office made a total of 177 recommendations upon completion of its full investigations and direct investigations. Of these, a total of 159 (89.8 per cent) were accepted by the departments and organisations for implementation while 18 (10.2 per cent) were under consideration as at June 30.

The Office resolved 149 cases (5.3 per cent) by mediation. The average processing time was about 13.4 days, with 89.3 per cent of the cases completed within one month and over 32 per cent were done within five days. Over 91 per cent of the complainants were satisfied with the work of mediators and all departments and organisations held a positive view of the outcome of the mediation.

In the reporting year, the Office received a total of 100 complaints about access to information, which was also a record high. This shows that public expectations of an open and accountable Government are on the rise. Inadequacies were found in 40 cases.

The Summary of the Annual Report is enclosed for reference. The full text can be viewed or downloaded from the Office of The Ombudsman website at www.ombudsman.hk.

