

Ombudsman's caseload reaches record high in pandemic year (with photo)

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

The Office of The Ombudsman received a record-breaking 29,814 complaints in the year 2020-21, according to its Annual Report published today (July 7).

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, said, "The profound impact of COVID-19 on all quarters of the community was evident throughout the past year. We find that effective public communication by government and public bodies is crucial. Dissemination of clear and timely information about changes to public service is vital to managing public expectations and boosting public confidence. Public service providers need to be agile and flexible to adjust their services in light of the changing circumstances and the lessons learned on the way."

The number of complaints received was up by 50.8 per cent over the 19,767 in 2019-20. Among the 29,814 complaints, there were 25,155 secondary cases in topical complaints, which was also an historic high. Issues bringing in a considerable amount of complaints in the year included the Government's alleged inaction against a tomb on government land, the handling of the pandemic as well as public service disruptions under COVID-19. Setting aside topical complaints, the number of "normal complaints" (i.e. complaints received excluding secondary cases) received was actually on par with that of recent years.

Among the complaints received, 167 complaints were concluded by the way of full investigation and 79 (47.3 per cent) of these cases were substantiated, partially substantiated or unsubstantiated but with other inadequacies found. Among the 2,480 inquiry cases concluded, inadequacies or deficiencies were found in 357 (14.4 per cent). Meanwhile, the Office completed nine direct investigations in the year.

During the year, the Office made a total of 194 recommendations upon completion of its full investigations and direct investigations. Of these, a total of 172 (88.7 per cent) were accepted by the organisations for implementation while 22 (11.3 per cent) were under consideration as at June 30, 2021.

The number of cases concluded by mediation climbed from 149 in 2019-20 to 179 cases in 2020-21, representing 6.3 per cent of the total number of cases pursued and concluded in the year. The average processing time of mediation was around 12 days. Of the successfully mediated cases in the year, over 56 per cent and 93 per cent were resolved within 10 days and less than one month, respectively. Of those complainants who responded to the Office's questionnaires, over 88 per cent had positive feedback on the mediation service.

During the year, the Office received a total of 110 complaints about access to information (ATI), which is a record high. The Office considered this a reflection of rising public expectations for an open and accountable Government. Among the 136 ATI complaints concluded, inadequacies were found in 58 cases (43 per cent).

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

