

Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC INTEREST

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**For the Good of the Public
and Those Who Serve the Public**



FOREWORD

The Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda was established in 2006 following the passing of the Ombudsman Act in 2004. At the official opening, then Premier, the Hon. W. Alexander Scott, remarked: “By investigating complaints to determine whether the Government is doing things in a fair and proper way, and by learning from what went wrong and translating the recommendations into action, you are not only improving governance, but you are improving people’s everyday experience with Government.” And so, the direction of the Office was set, and the mission today remains fundamentally the same: to protect the public interest whenever public services fall below standard. Bermuda’s first Ombudsman, Ms. Arlene Brock, quickly established the office as an independent and highly competent entity that did not hesitate to use its “own motion” investigation powers (conducting investigations even where there is no complaint) to take on big cases and uncover uncomfortable truths. Her successor, Ms. Victoria Pearman, took the reins in 2014 and brought a focus on individuals. She championed for fairness and the right for everyone to be heard with dignity and respect.

It is now my honour to hold the Office of Ombudsman, having been appointed by Her Excellency the Governor, Ms. Rena Lalgie, in March 2022. In developing this four-year strategic plan, I was mindful to avoid the trap of “change for change’s sake” (unnecessarily discarding tried and tested methods), while resisting the temptation to say “we’ve always done it that way” (maintaining business as usual without assessing effectiveness). My predecessors made it easy for me by establishing solid business foundations and a strong, capable reputation. This plan, therefore, represents a light touch on the high performance the Office has maintained over the last sixteen years. What follows represents a collaborative effort. I am most grateful to our committed team for their thoughtful, and honest, self-reflection during the analysis of our strengths and weaknesses. We held a focus group with representatives of the authorities that we oversee to identify what we do well, and to understand what we might do better to improve. We also sampled the general public to get a feel for how well known our work is and to gauge public confidence in our Office. We discovered that public support is strong amongst those familiar with us, but we are not widely recognised. We have taken steps to address this in our plan.

Our Strategic Plan for 2023–2026 aims to build on the results already achieved, and to prepare for the future. The list of strategic objectives forms a pathway towards delivering a

professional service that impacts both individual lives and the greater good of the public. The community can expect our Office to be accessible to everyone, work to restore fairness where unfairness has occurred, communicate openly and regularly, and demonstrate the value of our efforts. We invite everyone to review our Strategic Plan and to contact us directly with any questions or feedback, or to arrange for a presentation to community groups, public authorities or any interested parties.

Michael A. DeSilva



Ombudsman for Bermuda





MISSION STATEMENT

Our main purpose is to protect the public interest by providing a free, fair and independent resource to address complaints about public services. Our goal is to drive greater accountability and help improve standards across the public sector.

VALUES



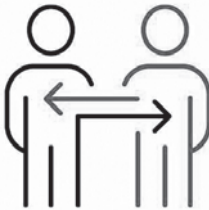
Independence

We are non-governmental, unbiased, and free from outside influence. We address complaints confidentially and we act with integrity.



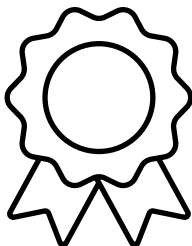
Fairness

We listen carefully to all sides, and we respond honestly and impartially. We investigate thoroughly and make decisions based on objective evaluations of the evidence.



Respect

We engage every individual with dignity and empathy, and we are accessible to everyone. We protect human rights, and we foster a positive work environment.



Professionalism

We are committed to high standards and transparency. We follow international guidelines and we learn from our experiences to improve our services.



STRATEGIC AIMS

The Office of the Ombudsman forms an integral part of good governance in Bermuda and makes an important contribution to the accountability of public administration, the protection and promotion of human rights, and the rule of law. We provide the public with an independent, capable, and inclusive resource to address their complaints against public authorities. Our goal is to resolve conflicts where we can and help improve the services of those authorities. Our four strategic aims provide us with direction to deliver our services, achieve our goals, and let the public know what they can expect from us over the next four years.

The strategic aims are to:

Enhance the impact of our work

Extend our accessibility

Establish a modernisation programme

Expand our community outreach



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. Enhance the impact of our work

Our Office serves the public. Our legitimacy to do so relies heavily on the degree of impact that we make. Our work provides complainants with avenues to seek redress, brings about positive changes to public policy and services, and restores fairness. We will develop systems, policies and procedures that maximise our effectiveness, improve our efficiency, and demonstrate value.

We will:

- Leverage international and local relationships to standardize our policies and ensure they are in line with published guidelines.
- Improve the pace at which we manage our caseload.
- Monitor the implementation of our recommendations by authorities, identify gaps, and encourage compliance by authorities.
- Share the learning from our casework by reporting publicly and engaging with authorities to improve their services.
- Utilise our legislative powers to conduct Own Motion Investigations to address issues that have wide public interest and impact.
- Develop an internal culture of learning that aims to improve all aspects of our work.
- Regularly report on our existing performance measures and develop additional measurements to give a full picture that accurately reflects our performance.
- Pursue accreditation of our Office and individual training standards.
- Develop a People Strategy that provides training and development opportunities for our staff, increases skillsets, creates a positive and healthy working environment, identifies succession plans and contributes to retention of key staff.



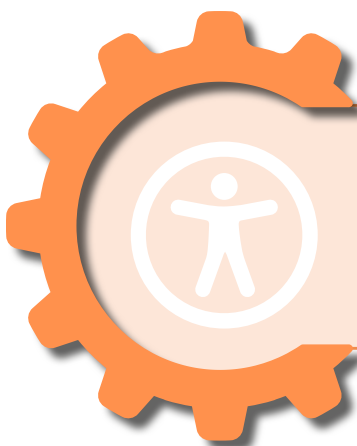
We deliver a professional service that impacts individual lives and restores fairness when unfairness has occurred.

2. Extend our accessibility

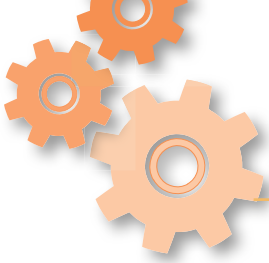
Our Office is available to everyone, and our services are free of charge. We provide our services with diversity, equity, and inclusion at the front of our minds. We will identify and remove any barriers that may prevent specific groups or individuals from having unrestricted access to us.

We will:

- Review our operations to ensure our services are accessible to all users, including: those who do not speak English; those with disabilities, health conditions or impairments; and those who may otherwise need special considerations or adjustments.
- Work with interpreters and other persons to assist complainants, as needed, in a confidential and respectful manner.
- Develop a plan to maintain service to the public in times of natural disasters, health emergencies, and other events that may disrupt normal business.
- Publish all our information in a transparent manner that is easily accessible, understandable, and available in different formats to meet specific individual needs.
- Capture and analyse data to understand the demographics of our service users, and to identify those groups to which we may not already be providing easy access.



We provide our services with diversity, equity, and inclusion at the front of our minds. Our services are easily accessible to users with disabilities or impairments, those that may need special adjustments, and non-English speakers.



3. Expand our community outreach

Our Office relies on public trust and confidence in order to function effectively. Good communication lies at the heart of building such trust and confidence. We will engage with our stakeholders, including the public, public authorities, the media, community groups and political representatives to maintain open, honest, and regular lines of communication.

We will:

- Implement a community outreach and public engagement strategy that promotes awareness of the work we do, shares good news stories arising from our casework, and inspires public confidence.
- Establish a brand for our Office that is easily recognisable and is associated with the positive reputation of our work.
- Use social media to greater effect by expanding our presence, increasing the number of platforms we use, and posting regular content.
- Develop surveys and feedback forms to measure public awareness, confidence, and satisfaction with our performance.



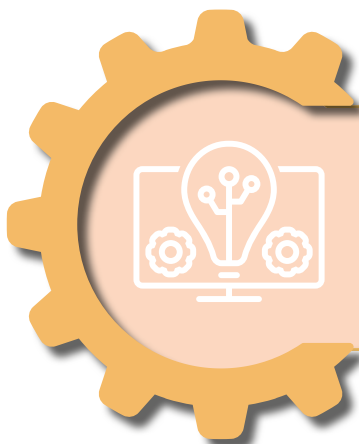
We maintain open, honest, and regular lines of communication with the community to inspire public confidence in our work. Our community outreach promotes awareness of the work we do and shares good news stories arising from our cases.

4. Establish a modernisation programme

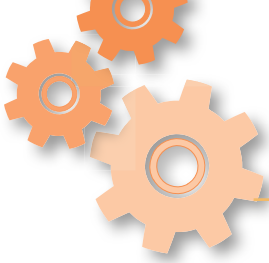
Our Office uses public funds to carry out its work. We are committed to using those funds effectively, working efficiently, and accounting for our expenditure. We will adopt an office environment that maximises the use of technology, is more productive, and reduces our environmental impact.

We will:

- Move to digital records management systems and establish a paperless environment wherever possible.
- Develop plans to meet external compliance obligations, including the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), Public Access to Information Act (PATI), Public Service Standards, financial audits, Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), and Ombudsman Association membership.
- Review our organisational structure and business processes to identify areas to improve office functions, consider options for growth, and continually pursue closer alignment with the Venice Principles.*
- Review our governing legislation to identify any gaps and make recommendations for the Legislature to consider appropriate and modern amendments.
- Implement eco-friendly habits that conserve energy use and reduce waste in our office space.



Our office environment maximises the use of technology and reduces our environmental impact. We are committed to meeting external compliance obligations, including PATI, PIPA, Public Service Standards, and others.



** The Venice Commission, officially the European Commission for Democracy through Law, is an advisory body of the Council of Europe, composed of independent experts in the field of constitutional law. In 2019 the Commission adopted the “Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution,” (“The Venice Principles”). The 25 Venice Principles represent the first, independent, international set of standards for the Ombudsman institution. They play a key role in strengthening existing Ombudsman offices by providing best practice guidance, and setting the template for new offices where none are present. The Venice Principles can be found here: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2019\)005-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2019)005-e)*





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