

**Office of the Ombudsman Start Up Year – 1,057 Complaints  
Two Recommendations to Council**

**Toronto, January 21, 2010** – The Toronto Ombudsman’s office managed 1,057 complaints and enquiries in its first nine-months of operation, processing and closing 91 per cent of them, according to its first Annual Report, released today by Toronto Ombudsman Fiona Crean.

The report, submitted to City Council as a legislative requirement under the City of Toronto Act, sets out the number of complaints, the most common type of complaints, and the areas of the city most complained about. The report also sets out the Ombudsman’s strategic plan for the next three years.

“We were responsive to individual complaints in our first year,” Crean said. “And I expect that to continue in 2010.” However, she noted that her office wants to get on to the business of conducting systemic investigations, and requires additional resources to do both effectively.

Crean described systemic investigations as those that deal with recurring problems that affect many people. “They require dedicated resources, but recommendations arising out of these investigations will save the city money, reduce public frustration and allow the public service to get on with other work,” she noted.

Crean hastened to point out that the number of complaints about a particular service area, is not necessarily an indicator of poor service. “The real litmus test is how well service areas respond to the complaints they do get,” Crean noted.

Poor customer service was the most common complaint, Crean noted, followed by adverse impact of decisions on residents and a failure to communicate properly with a complainant.

Crean said that publicising the city’s customer service standards would be a major step forward. She also noted that as an office of ‘last resort’ the Ombudsman relies heavily on the Toronto Public Service’s own internal complaint processes to resolve issues before they move on to her office.

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Of the 29 service areas that Crean reviewed, 13 had good complaints systems in place that were published, 7 had good systems that were not published, and the remaining 9 either shared no information with the Ombudsman, or had complaints procedures that were inadequate. Information about the City's internal complaints processes is available on the Ombudsman's website at <http://www.ombudstoronto.ca> under "How to Complain - Complaint Finder."

"The other day a city manager told my staff that she was exactly the right person to talk to, and if the resident had only called her, the problem could have been fixed right away," Crean said, "it was just that neither our office nor the complainant knew that."

The two recommendations the Ombudsman is making to City Council for approval are: to ensure that every area of the Toronto Public Service that interacts directly with the public develops and publishes their own complaint systems in 2010; and that the Toronto Public Service publishes its customer service standards in 2010.

The Office of the Ombudsman is committed to being responsive and accountable to the City of Toronto and its residents. It is responsible for reviewing public complaints about administrative unfairness and making recommendations to City Council to improve service.

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