

Report of the Office of the Ombudsman external survey for Statement of Strategy

Introduction

In 2025, the Office of the Ombudsman (the Office) conducted a public consultation process to inform the development of our Statement of Strategy 2026-2028. Barncat Consulting managed the external stakeholder survey on behalf of the Office. This was done using EUSurvey, a free and GDPR compliant online survey tool. The survey included ten specific questions and was issued for each of the following six statutory bodies which together are supported by the Office corporate spine:

- Office of the Ombudsman
- Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC)
- Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information (OCEI)
- Office of the Protected Disclosure Commissioner (OPDC)
- Standards in Public Office Commission (Standards Commission)
- Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA)





The survey was open for four weeks in October 2025. A total of 146 responses were received. Many organisations contributed to more than one of the surveys. A total of 59 different organisations contributed to the surveys. There was also an option to remain anonymous in providing feedback, but relatively few respondents availed of this option. The table below sets out the number of the responses received by each office.

Office	Number
Office of the Ombudsman	25
OIC	46
OCEI	19
OPDC	23
Standards Commission	11
CPSA	22
Total	146

The following is a brief overview of the results for each of the statutory bodies.

1) Office of the Ombudsman

How well do you think the Office of the Ombudsman is performing its duties?

		Answers	Percentage
Very well		13	52%
Reasonably well		10	40%
Needs improvement		1	4%
Very poorly		0	0%
Don't know		1	4%
No Answer		0	0%

What works well?

- There was praise for the Office of the Ombudsman's **communication and engagement** with public sector bodies and, in particular, the availability of case workers.
- Equally, praise for the Office of the Ombudsman's **respect** for those making the complaint, and understanding of both sides perspective.

What could be improved?

- Several calls for **greater sectoral understanding**. Individual responses ask for greater understanding of: healthcare organisation processes; individual local government processes; functions of specific offices and maintaining good understanding of public bodies' organisational processes in light of staff turnover.
- **Case closure notification and feedback**, and/or **online tracking system**. There are a number of comments that notification is not always received when a case is closed. One comment requested greater feedback/shared learnings on case closure, and another suggested an online tracking system would be helpful.

What objectives should be prioritised?







- **Awareness** in both public service bodies and in the public in general about the role of the Ombudsman (while also **managing expectations**).
- **Case studies, case reporting and continued engagement** with public sector bodies to identify trends and issues and improve practice.

Ombudsman list of contributors

No	Category or organisation where provided
1	Academic institute
2	AsIAm- Ireland's Autism Charity.
3	Cork County Council
4	Cork County Council
5	Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment
6	Department of Education and Youth
7	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
8	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
9	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
10	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
11	Department of the Taoiseach
12	Department of Transport
13	Galway County Council
14	Health Service Executive
15	A member of Seanad Eireann
16	Quality manager in a large Acute Academic Adult Public Hospital
17	Limerick City and County Council
18	Mental Health Ireland
19	Simon Communities of Ireland
20	Tailte Éireann
21	Technological University of the Shannon, Midlands: Midwest
22	Tusla
23	Tusla Child and Family Agency
24	University College Dublin
25	Wexford County Council

2) OIC

How well do you think the OIC is performing its duties?

		Answers	Percentage
Very well		13	28%
Reasonably well		26	56%
Needs improvement		4	8%
Very poorly		1	2%
Don't know		2	4%
No Answer		1	2%

What works well?

- The **quality of the decisions** was praised by a large number of respondents, as *“thorough and well-considered.”*
- Respondents were generally very happy with **the level of engagement and availability of OIC staff**, deeming it *“pleasant, professional, informative and supportive.”*
- The **guidance and resources** available to public bodies contending with FOI issues was also praised, in particular the Guidance Note and the decisions repository.

What could be improved?

- **Timeliness** was the most frequently cited area for improvement. There was in many cases a level of awareness that this was a resource issue.
- In terms of **engagement with public bodies**, there was a call for more of the same in terms of guidance, webinars etc. A few respondents made a request for **more tailored advice** for dealing with FOI cases.
- For the **decisions repository**, a request was made that it could be searchable by outcome or by Department as well as by Section of the FOI Act.

What objectives should be prioritised?

- **Continued engagement** with public bodies as outlined above, including updated guidance for the **proposed updated FOI Act**.
- Addressing **staff turnover** was also noted as a priority, as it impacts on institutional knowledge and handling of ongoing decisions.
- A couple of respondents cited **AI** as an emerging concern for OIC, e.g. *“Technology is changing how records are created, therefore transparency around content creation and decision making by machines or AI rather than individuals who are accountable may impact on the core principle of the FOI Act in terms of transparency and accountability in the Public Sector.”*

Information Commissioner list of contributors

	Category or organisation where provided
1	Academic Institute
2	Academic Institute
3	Anonymous
4	Avista Clg.
5	Central Bank of Ireland
6	Cork County Council
7	Cork County Council
8	Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE)
9	Department of Defence
10	Department of Education and Youth
11	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
12	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
13	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
14	Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration
15	Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation
16	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
17	Department of Social Protection
18	Department of the Taoiseach
19	Department of Transport
20	Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)
21	Galway County Council
22	Gas Networks Ireland
23	Government department
24	Government department
25	Health and Safety Authority
26	Health Services Executive
27	Higher Education Authority
28	Iarnród Éireann
29	Limerick City and County Council
30	Mayo County Council
31	Mental Health Ireland
32	Muiriosa Foundation
33	National University of Ireland
34	Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
35	Pobal, a registered charity.
36	Public Appointments Service
37	Right to Know
38	Simon Communities of Ireland
39	Southern Regional Assembly
40	Statutory body or agency
41	Tailte Éireann

42	Technological University of the Shannon, Midlands:Midwest
43	The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission
44	The Department of Climate, Energy & the Environment (DCEE)
45	Tusla - Child & Family Agency
46	Wexford County Council

3) OCEI

How well do you think OCEI is performing its duties?

		Answers	Percentage
Very well		4	21%
Reasonably well		8	42%
Needs improvement		3	16%
Very poorly		0	0%
Don't know		4	21%
No Answer		0	0%

All but four of the respondents to the OCEI survey also completed an OIC survey so unsurprisingly, some of the emerging themes are quite similar.

What works well?

- Many respondents praised **the engagement** with the OCEI, for example “...a very positive experience.... The engagement has always been respectful, thoughtful and well considered.”
- The **guidance available**, including the decisions repository was cited as extremely helpful.
- Decisions are felt to be transparent and well- reasoned: *They provide open fair and transparent reviews - decisions are well written and easy to understand.*

What could be improved?

- Improved **turnaround times** for issuing of responses.
- **Further engagement** with AIE Officers, through webinars, training etc.

What objectives should be prioritised?

- Similar to those outlined above, the updating of the AIE regulations, faster turnaround times, suggestions for specific types of engagement with AIE Officers.

OCEI list of contributors





NB: In bold below are the organisations that provided a response to OCEI but not to OIC- all others here also provided a response to OIC.

	Category or organisation where provided
1	Clare County Council
2	Coillte
3	Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM)
4	Department of Defence
5	Department of Education and Youth
6	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
7	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

8	Department of the Taoiseach
9	Department of Transport
10	Donegal County Council
11	Galway County Council
12	Government department
13	Government department
14	HSE National Environmental Health Service
15	Limerick City and County Council
16	Local authority
17	Mayo County Council
18	Tailte Éireann
19	The Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment

4) OPDC

How well do you think OPDC is performing its duties?

		Answers	Percentage
Very well		11	48%
Reasonably well		8	35%
Needs improvement		1	4%
Very poorly		0	0%
Don't know		3	13%
No Answer		0	0%
Total		23	

What works well?

- **Timeliness and the rapid response of OPDC** was the most frequently cited positive, *“Excellent at sending reports of wrongdoing to appropriate organisations in a timely fashion.”* There was an acknowledgment that the timelines can be too tight: *“the process would benefit from expanded timeframes so all disclosures can be given the proper measured consideration they need.”*
- The **approachability and engagement with OPDC staff**: *“In my experience the Office of the Protected Disclosures Commissioner has an open approachable demeanor.”*
- The **procedures put in place**, *“The OPDC has put in place robust processes for dealing with all protected disclosures they receive.”*
- The **information and guidance provided** was deemed very helpful, with participants referencing particular events that they attended which they found useful.

What could be improved?

- Various suggestion for **further improvement of procedures** are made in the responses. Some of them may not be implementable without legislative change while others may be more easily addressed, for example: *“It would be useful to be advised as to where the Commissioner sends a report that we have sent over that has been received via the Ministerial channel. “*
- A number of suggestions for **closer engagement with protected disclosure officers** in various bodies, through training, newsletters, emails, structured engagements etc.

What objectives could be prioritised?

- Growing numbers of protected disclosures, and the need to be prepared to deal with them, e.g. – *“This [increase in protected disclosures] is a positive in that it demonstrates increased trust in the process. However, there will be a need for increased investment to adequately cope with this level of growth.”*




- **Continued engagement with public bodies, and enhancement of public awareness of protected disclosures.**

OPDC list of contributors

	Category or organisation where provided
1	An Garda Síochána
2	Central Bank of Ireland ('Central Bank')
3	Defence Forces Ireland
4	Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment
5	Department of Education and Youth
6	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
7	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
8	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
9	Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration
10	Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation.
11	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG)
12	Department of the Taoiseach
13	Department of Transport
14	Fine
15	Galway Co Council
16	Government department
17	Government department
18	Health Service Executive (HSE)
19	HSE
20	Irish Prison Service
21	South Dublin County Council
22	Technological University of the Shannon, Midlands: Midwest
23	Wexford County Council

5) Standards Commission

How well do you think the Standards Commission is performing its duties?

		Answers	Percentage
Very well		7	64%
Reasonably well		3	27%
Needs improvement		1	9%
Very poorly		0	0%
Don't know		0	0%
No Answer		0	0%
Total		11	

What works well?

- The most frequently cited element related to the **clear guidance** available from the Standards Commission, for example: *“Information that is concise and easy to digest & understand”*
- There was also praise for **Standards Commission staff and their engagement and responsiveness**. *“The staff at SIPO provide excellent advice ...Staff are very knowledgeable, personable and helpful and I'm never left waiting for answers.”*

What could be improved?

- Some respondents suggested it would be helpful if it were made clear **who does what in the Standards Commission**, to allow them to reach the right person with their query.
- Greater automation to streamline the processing of returns.

What objectives should be prioritised?





- Continued **awareness raising** of responsibilities and **engagement** with public sector bodies.
- Greater automation/digital platform as above.

Standards Commission list of contributors

	Category or organisation where provided
1	Cork County Council
2	DCEE
3	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
4	Department of Public Expenditure Infrastructure Public Service Reform and Digitalisation
5	Department of the Taoiseach
6	Food Safety Authority of Ireland
7	National Treasury Management Agency
8	South Dublin County Council
9	Tailte Éireann
10	The Labour Party
11	University College Dublin

6) CPSA

How well do you think CPSA is performing its duties?

		Answers	Percentage
Very well		9	41%
Reasonably well		11	50%
Needs improvement		3	13%
Very poorly		0	0%
Don't know		1	4%
No Answer		0	0%

*Does not total to 100% as two respondents picked more than one category.

What works well?

- Communication and engagement by CPSA staff as– *“easy to contact and easy to engage with.”*
- Respondents appreciated guidance from the CPSA, especially the amalgamated Code of Practice: *Code of Practice is useful and clear.*

What could be improved?

- Timelines was the most frequently cited theme here, in terms of competition approvals and processing of complaints.
- A couple of respondents suggested further updates to the Code of Practice.

What objectives should be prioritised?

- Emphasis on ensuring compliance e.g.: *Ensuring all Departments with External Recruitment Licence understand compliance and promoting this.*
- Improving turnaround times as possible. A key risk noted in this regard is the current lengthy timelines in recruitment through publicjobs.ie having a knock on effect: *Because of current publicjobs timelines, there is a risk that more Civil Service departments will be required to run their own Open competition, therefore place further demand on the CPSA services to review and approve.*

CPSA list of contributors

	Category or organisation where provided
1	CEA
2	Cork County Council
3	Courts Service
4	Department of Energy Climate & the Environment
5	Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment
6	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
7	Department of Health Ireland
8	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

9	Department of Justice
10	Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation
11	Department of Social Protection
12	Department of the Taoiseach
13	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
14	Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman
15	Mayo County Council
16	N/A
17	Office of Public Works
18	Public Appointments Service
19	South Dublin County Council
20	The Courts Service
21	Tusla Child and Family Agency
22	Wexford County Council