

# Commissioner's foreword



As the Western Australian Public Sector Commissioner I am in a unique position to have a broad view of the operations and achievements of our public authorities, including State government agencies, local governments, public universities, government trading enterprises, and many government boards and committees. Over the past year I have observed our sectors beginning to transform, with leaders reinventing their organisations, reassessing their operating environment and reinforcing core public service values and principles.

I am pleased to deliver to the Parliament of Western Australia, public authorities and the Western Australian community my sixth *State of the sectors* report. The theme of the 2016 report—Reassess, reinvent, reinforce—follows on from last year's report where I observed the sectors creating opportunities and using this momentum to drive renewal. I believe we are now seeing these efforts come to fruition.

This report contains my observations about our sectors, based on data collected from our survey program and my regular interactions with public authorities across the State. As this past year marked the start of new arrangements for reporting minor and serious misconduct under the *Corruption, Crime and Misconduct Act 2003*, we now have a very broad picture of the conduct of public officers. I am confident this report reflects the transformation of the integrity landscape and will provide a solid benchmark going forward.

Overall the sectors are in good shape. Our workforce is outwardly flexible and well positioned to contend with current and future challenges as they arise. However, the data only provides part of the story. I believe the greatest insight, reflection and learning comes through showcasing good practice, innovation and collaboration. This year we have seen many examples of public authorities transforming themselves and redefining the way the community uses government services.

The Underground Perth Busport Project, managed by the Public Transport Authority, has transformed public transport in the metropolitan area by enhancing the commuter experience. Landgate through its Land Registry is transforming the way land registration transactions are conducted to meet the future needs of the State in the digital age. The establishment of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and its work on the *Digital WA strategy* will also redefine how public sector agencies operate in our increasingly digital world. All are examples that highlight an ongoing commitment by public sector agencies to become smart, agile and innovative businesses, improving the way the community accesses information and services.

We have also seen some of the largest service-based agencies reinvent the way they do business. The Departments of Health, Training and Workforce Development, and Child Protection and Family Support are just a few. I acknowledge the leaders of these agencies who agreed to share their transformation stories. Their journey is featured throughout the report – ‘In their own words’ – and are both enlightening and thought-provoking. I aim to continue to highlight good practice and share stories that will enable leaders to use the lessons learned as they embark on their own journey.

Fiscal pressures, rapidly changing information and communications technology and evolving workforce demographics are key factors leading to a more complex operating environment. However, external pressures should be anticipated and considered as part of any effective transformation process. Over the last 12 months, public authorities have been shaped by legislative changes and workforce initiatives. A case in point relates to changes to the oversight of minor and serious misconduct and the misconduct prevention and education functions—the biggest transformation to the integrity landscape in over a decade—which we have led in partnership with the Corruption and Crime Commission. While the data shows we have inherently ethical public authorities, it has also revealed there are vast differences in the maturity of systems and processes to prevent and manage misconduct.

Over the past year we have seen how public perception can be influenced by the offer and acceptance of gifts, benefits and hospitality by public officers. We have also seen how the maturity of governance systems of public authorities, and capability of public

officers, in managing these issues appropriately varies across the sectors. The risks associated with government procurement has also been highlighted during the year, particularly the relationships that can exist between public officers involved in making procurement decisions and service providers. In light of these issues, the Commission has sought to assure that public authorities understand how to report conduct-related matters and determine if they are complying with their legislative requirements. The results of this assurance work is highlighted in the 'Evaluations across the sectors' features in the report. Highlights from our 'Arrangements to manage misconduct and notify minor misconduct' evaluation starts on page 58 and highlights from 'Personal use of publicly-funded facilities by public officers' is on page 66. Both evaluations provide key learnings all public authorities should consider.

Mastering the ambiguity and uncertainty created by external pressures is not easy and affects organisational culture, governance and capability. Leaders must ensure their people are sufficiently capable of managing the complexities of external pressures. This involves authorities constantly scanning the external environment and realigning the business to meet the demands and expectations of the government and community.

In my view leaders need to re-think the organisational paradigm to take advantage of the transformation process and ensure an approach that addresses the future, not just the here and now. It is imperative this is supported by strong organisational culture, good governance, ethical decision making frameworks and the necessary capabilities. As evidenced by our leaders featured throughout the report, true and lasting transformation requires change across all parts of the system and 'buy-in' from all stakeholders—particularly our people.

The change process should consider the interests of our employees and allow them to engage meaningfully with it, especially as it relates to their roles and responsibilities. Above all, we must continue to invest in the development of our employees as the nature and scope of our work evolves and incorporate diverse perspectives. Similarly, it is important to reinforce the core principles of public service, by acting in the public interest, embedding integrity and accountability, and understanding what it means to be a public employee of this State. These are the building blocks on which strong and ethical sectors are built.



M C Wauchope  
PUBLIC SECTOR COMMISSIONER

17 November 2016