

17 March 2023

C164632

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request of 2 February 2023 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about community notifications.

Public safety is Corrections' top priority. Approximately 15,000 people are required to be released from prison each year, and we are committed to doing everything we can to ensure each person is safely reintegrated into the community and has safe, suitable accommodation. Corrections does not decide prison sentences, or when someone is released into the community.

We fully acknowledge that the location of offenders can be a concern for communities, and the safety of communities is paramount in any decisions we make.

Most people released from prison can choose where to live, or have provided the New Zealand Parole Board with a release plan for consideration, prior to leaving prison. Some people require assistance with finding a place to live. Providing offenders with stable accommodation is critical to successfully reintegrating them into society and helping them remain crime-free. The reality is that without accommodation, people would be homeless, which would present an unacceptable safety risk to communities.

Community notifications, in relation to specific offenders, are carried out on a case-by-case basis, with the primary consideration being whether notification will enhance public safety and/or assist in the management of an offender's risk. Corrections' current policy is largely focused on community notification for child sex offenders. It does also provide for the notification of people subject to Extended Supervision Orders or other offenders in certain circumstances.

We have taken on board recent public concerns about how we notify local communities when people are released from prison, and commissioned an independent review into our notification policy to ensure it is clear, transparent, fit for purpose and contributes to public safety.

The review is being led by Dr Gwenda Willis, an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Auckland. It will cover:

- The current community notification and engagement process to ensure it is clear, transparent, fit for purpose and contributes to enhancing the safety of communities.
- Recent changes in legislation, policy and practice relating to the assessment and management of accommodation in the community as far back as the previous review undertaken in 2018.
- Relevant supported accommodation services provided or accessed to prevent the risk of further harm to the community.

We wrote to you on 3 March 2023 to refuse parts of your request that we could not answer without substantial collation or research, and to inform you that we needed to extend the due date for the remainder of your request. We acknowledge that on 8 March 2023 you made a revised request for the information we refused, which we will respond to separately.

The remainder of your request asks for:

5) A copy of any written material used as information or advice given to the public in case of a notification

6) A copy of any verbal briefs given to Corrections staff used as information or advice when informing the public in case of a notification

Corrections does not have nationwide templates or standardised information used for all community notifications. The written material and verbal information may differ according to the needs of a particular region or district and will be further tailored to the individual or community involved in a particular notification.

We carry out general engagement with all community leaders, including schools and early childhood centre managers about the work of Corrections and the processes we have in place to manage the safe return to the community of people convicted for sexually harmful behaviour against children.

Where possible, engagement with the community around a notification is carried out in person, with written material provided for engagement with relevant organisations and people who may not be home when Corrections' staff are door knocking in their community. Corrections staff will also provide contact details for any follow up questions or issues after speaking with someone on their doorstep.

Please find attached examples of these documents obtained from Corrections' Southern Region. While exact documents are likely to differ, similar information is used for notifications around the country. The attached documents include:

- A "leave behind" letter, which is left at addresses when nobody is home during a community notification door knocking.

- A notification letter given to education providers for their own use. Education providers decide whether to use this letter and can choose to modify it to meet their needs.
- Examples of engagement emails sent to schools and organisations advising them that a notification is taking place in their community.
- Examples of verbal briefs given during the notification process.

Please be advised that should you have any concerns regarding this response you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate our decision to extend the timeframe. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Leigh Marsh
National Commissioner