

5 April 2024

C174907

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request of 27 October 2023 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about minimum entitlements and staffing levels.

We apologise that we have not met the extended due date for responding to your request. Given the delay in responding to you, we have included updated information in response to a number of your questions.

You requested:

1. *How many prisons are currently allowing face-to-face visits?*

Please identify by prison name and include when visits resumed at each prison, and if not resumed, when they were suspended.

Please clarify whether full visiting rights have resumed, or whether partial.

We have interpreted these questions as referring to private visitors as referred to in section 73 of the Corrections Act 2004.

Corrections maintains an up-to-date list of visit status for each prison at the following link: https://www.corrections.govt.nz/our_work/in_prison/staying_connected_with_people_in_prison/visits/prison_visit_updates

Therefore, this part of your request is refused in accordance with section 18(d) of the OIA, as the information is publicly available.

Corrections paused visits across the prison network in January 2022 in response to widespread community transmission of COVID-19. Like many other agencies and businesses, Corrections has experienced a number of challenges when it comes to staffing.

Corrections top priority is the safety of staff, people in prison and the community. When we are experiencing lower staffing levels than usual, it is important that resources are directed

towards maintaining safe staffing levels in prison units. This has meant that not all prisons have been able to resume visits with full availability.

The table below shows the week in which each prison site managed by Corrections first received private visits following the pausing of visits in January 2022.

Prison	Visits resumed in week beginning
Northland Region Corrections Facility	30 May 2022
Waikeria Prison	13 June 2022
Otago Corrections Facility	27 June 2022
Rolleston Prison	4 July 2022*
Christchurch Women's Prison	11 July 2022
Rimutaka Prison	11 July 2022 & 11 March 2024**
Manawatū Prison	15 August 2022
Invercargill Prison	29 August 2022
Tongariro Prison	12 September 2022
Christchurch Men's Prison	26 September 2022
Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility	3 October 2022
Whanganui Prison	21 November 2022
Arohata Prison	30 January 2023
Auckland Prison	20 February 2023
Hawke's Bay Regional Prison	6 March 2023
Mt Eden Corrections Facility	22 May 2023
Spring Hill Corrections Facility	29 May 2023

* Visits at Rolleston Prison were paused over the weekend of 23 and 24 March 2024 due to low staff levels, and resumed the following weekend. Reasons for low staff levels included illness, leave requirements and staff being required off-site for hospital escorts.

** Visits briefly reopened at Rimutaka Prison, but were paused again on 4 August 2022 due to a new COVID-19 outbreak, and remained suspended until 11 March 2024 due to staffing challenges.

2. What are the unlock hours across all current prisons?

Please identify by prison name and specific unlock hours.

Please specify how long the unlock hours have been in place for each prison.

Please find attached, as Appendix One, a report providing a summary of the unlock regimes in place for each prison site as at 28 January 2024.

Different units within prisons may have different unlock hours, and these regimes are subject to change due to operational requirements, security or our current staffing challenges.

Prisons can be volatile environments, and some of our prisons accommodate the country's most dangerous and high-risk people. Each day, prior to any unlock, staff must assess and

manage a range of operational requirements and risks, including which prisoners can be unlocked together, whether they are segregated or in the mainstream population, whether there is a risk of them associating with co-offenders, and whether there are any gang tensions that may pose a risk to the safety of staff and other prisoners, as well as the security of the prison.

Unlock regimes will also differ between and within sites based on security classifications. Many prisoners in maximum security have long histories of antisocial behaviour, and can behave unpredictably and act without warning. Because of this, maximum security units require a higher number of staff to carry out unlocks. If there are less staff than required, the unit will operate on an alternate regime to carry out unlock so the same group of prisoners are not always affected.

Providing more detailed information about unlock regimes in each prison and unit would require multiple Corrections sites to undertake manual collation of this data, and would have a substantial impact on frontline operations. As noted at the end of this request, this part of your request is refused due to the substantial collation required.

3. *It is my understanding that prisoners are often having meetings scheduled within these unlock hours – including with lawyers and probation staff – please clarify whether this is the case?*

Please explain how prisoner meetings are organised and scheduled and whether they are given specific time out of their cells in order to do this, that does not impact their standard unlock hours.

There are a number of activities which people in prison are required or entitled to do, which may take place during unlock hours. This includes private, statutory and legal visits, and phone calls.

However, if the unit unlock regime at that time provides only the minimum entitlement of one hour, the time taken for these meetings or activities must be in addition to the one hour of unlock time. This may be provided by scheduling the meeting or activity outside the unlock time, or by extending the unlock time.

4. *In a response to my OIA Request of 16 September 2022, Corrections mentioned the following:*

“As you know, we have plans to undertake a series of prisoner movements to rebalance our population in a way that alleviates pressure on our most impacted prisons.”

Please update me on how many prisoners have been relocated, including where they have moved from and to, and whether that has “alleviated pressures” on the most impacted prisons.

New Zealand's 18 prisons are managed as a network, and managing the availability of appropriate accommodation at each site is a complex exercise. For example, not all sites have appropriate beds for prisoners of every security classification, and we must also have regard to the need to facilitate each person's rehabilitation and reintegration, and the desirability of placing people as close as practicable to their families.

Accordingly, movement of people between prisons happens on an ongoing basis and for a number of different reasons provided for in the Corrections Act 2004. Examples of reasons for people to be moved between prisons include management of the prison population, attendance at court hearings, availability of rehabilitation programmes, and the person's sentencing status and/or security classification.

The people moved as part of the network rebalancing exercise between September and December 2022 had their reason for moving recorded as "Population management". These movements were not recorded separately to the regular movements that are made to manage the prison population. Corrections has continued to move people to rebalance the prison population beyond the initial period of the rebalancing exercise.

Between 1 September 2022 and 31 December 2022, 1,306 people were moved between prisons with the reason for moving recorded as "Population management".

Corrections continues to use movement of people between prisons to balance the prison population, which has alleviated the pressures on the prisons most affected by staffing challenges.

5. *Please also update me on the national recruitment drive.
How many applications have been received since the start of the recruitment campaign?
How many progressed to training?
How many completed their training and are now working within the prisons?*

Corrections is making a concerted effort to recruit, retain and train frontline custodial staff. This includes launching a recruitment campaign, strengthening recruitment processes, improving onboarding processes, implementing new rosters, and continuously working to improve staff safety. The number of Corrections Officers working in prisons is steadily increasing due to our recruitment campaign and improved staff retention.

Applicants for Corrections Officer roles undergo a rigorous selection process, including multiple assessments to ensure their suitability for the role. Due to the high level of integrity required of staff working in prisons, thorough pre-employment checks must also be carried out. These include Police vetting, drug testing, a physical fitness test and medical check, and a reference check prior to employment.

We received more than 26,700 applications for frontline custodial roles between 1 October 2022 and 19 March 2024. More than 1,300 people have been recruited into Corrections Officer roles, with many more in the recruitment pipeline. As at 19 March 2024, 896 people

had completed their initial training and begun working at a prison site, 414 were still in training, and 46 were scheduled to begin training.

We are continuing our recruitment efforts, with a new advertising campaign resulting in a sharp increase in applications for Corrections Officer roles. More than 6,200 applications have been received since the launch of the new recruitment campaign on 4 February 2024.

6. *Please provide an update on staff retention and whether this has increased or decreased.*

What staff retention initiatives have been offered and implemented within Corrections?

Staff retention has improved, with a 15.4% drop in the average number of Corrections Officers leaving per month in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23.

A number of staff retention measures have been implemented across Corrections, including:

- Improving the physical safety of our Community Corrections service centres.
- Continuously working to improve staff safety.
- Investing in the capability and training of our frontline staff.
- Implementing new rosters.
- Continuing to work with our union partners on matters concerning staffing levels and staff safety.
- Improving our wellbeing initiatives, including injury management, wellbeing, and health promotion.
- Making sure people have clear pathways to build a long-term career at Corrections.

We anticipate that the new collective agreement ratified by our union partners in November 2023 will also have a positive impact on staff retention, with changes including improved pay and benefits, as well as safety and wellbeing provisions.

7. *What information has been provided to the Minister in the last five months regarding unlock hours, population pressures, and staffing levels and recruitment?*

Please note: In relation to each of these requests, this information should include all documents of any nature, including but not limited to any correspondence, text messages, memos, notes and advisory notes, and emails relating to these matters.

Corrections provides a weekly report to the Minister, which includes an update on current prison capacity. We also provide twice-weekly updates on the current prison population to the Minister's office.

We have not identified any briefings about unlock hours, population pressures and staffing levels and recruitment, or other specific advice which Corrections provided to former Corrections Minister Hon Kelvin Davis during this period. However, Corrections officials provide advice and information to the Minister in a number of different ways, and it is

possible that other information about these topics was provided to the then-Minister during this period. This could include information provided verbally during meetings, or information provided as part of other briefings or reports.

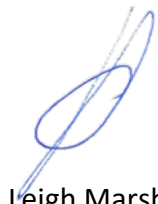
Identifying all such advice would require us to manually review all documents provided to the Minister's office by any Corrections team during the relevant period. In addition, providing all documents related to any of your questions would require us to undertake a significant amount of manual collation. For example, while we have collated the statistics you have requested about recruitment of prison staff, we anticipate a search of our email system would find many thousands of emails using the term 'recruitment' during the period of the current recruitment drive. This is likely to be similar for any of your questions.

Therefore, we are refusing the remainder of your request in accordance with section 18(f) of the OIA, because providing a response would require us to undertake substantial collation and research.

We have consulted with you in accordance with section 18B, but have not had a response from you clarifying these parts of your request. We have also considered whether a longer extension to the due date for your request or charging you for the request would remove the need for us to refuse your request. However, these measures would not remove the significant impact on teams across Corrections, so we do not believe this would be a good use of our publicly-funded resources.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Leigh Marsh
Commissioner Custodial Services

Current Custodial Operating Settings Update— Northern Region

Prepared 8 February 2024 (reporting period 22 January 2024 to 28 January 2024)



ARA POUTAMA AOTEAROA
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

NRCF

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating with normal unlock hours (0830-1130 and from 1300-1600). There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ✔ **Visits Status:** Visits are operating as normal with the exception of Thursday visits. The site has suspended visits each Thursday to cover unplanned absences and to maintain business as usual.

ASCF

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating with normal unlock hours. Regimes differ between units depending on classification. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ✔ **Visit status:** Visits operating.

ARWCF

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** Prisoners in low security units are unlocked at 7:30 am daily and locked at 6:30pm. Prisoners in high security settings are currently receiving a minimum of 3.45 hours out of cell per day. There were three centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024. This related to a prisoner who was threatening toward staff.
- ✔ **Visits Status:** Visits operating Monday to Saturday inclusive.

AUCKLAND PRISON

- ✘ **Unlock Regimes:** Regimes are determined each day depending on staffing resource. There were no centrally reported denials of the entitlement to one hour physical exercise to the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ⚠ **Visits Status:** Private visits operating in units 6 and 8, one day per week. Visits in units 1-5 (high security) have recommenced. Dates for visits in units 10-13 (maximum) are still to be confirmed.

MECF

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** Regimes are determined each day depending on staffing resource. As weekend rosters are reduced, rolling unlock regimes between morning and afternoon are utilised by all units. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ✔ **Visits Status:** Visits operating.



SHCF

⚠️ **Unlock Regimes:** Regimes are determined each day depending on staffing resource. Depending on security classification and unit, prisoners are being unlocked for a minimum of one hour per day and up to four hours per day. There were three centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024. This related to three prisoners who were threatening towards staff.

✅ **Visits Status:** Visits operating.

WAIKERIA PRISON

✅ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating with 7am-7pm unlock hours with an extended lunchtime lock (1pm to 3pm) on Fridays. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.

✅ **Visits Status:** Visits operating.

TONGARIRO PRISON

✅ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating with normal unlock hours. All units are unlocked during weekdays by 8:15am at the latest and 9:15am during weekends. On occasion rolling unlocks are used because of short staffing. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.

✅ **Visits Status:** Visits operating.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

Current Custodial Operating Settings Update—Lower North Region

Prepared 8 February 2024 (reporting period 15 January 2024 to 28 January 2024)



ARA POUTAMA AOTEAROA
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

HAWKES BAY PRISON

✓ **Unlock Regimes:** Regimes are determined each day depending on staffing resource. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.

✓ **Visits Status:** Face to face visits are currently running Monday to Friday, with four, 45 minute sessions a day. This is for both Low and High Security. Legal visits operating as normal.

WHANGANUI PRISON

✓ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating within normal unlock hours. Prisoners receive approximately seven hours per day outside their cells in high security settings and nine hours in low security. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.

✓ **Visits Status:** Visits operating— 2 days per week (45 minutes each)

MANAWATU PRISON

✓ **Unlock Regimes:** Regimes are determined each day depending on staffing resource . Prisoners in low security units are unlocked at 7:30 am daily and locked at 6:30pm. Prisoners in high security settings are currently receiving a minimum of 3.45 hours out of cell per day. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.

✓ **Visits Status:** Visits operating – One day per week on Friday.

RIMUTAKA PRISON

– **Unlock Regimes:** Restricted regimes are operating in the remand space, however each prisoner is unlocked for at least 1 hour and 30minutes daily. Low security units are running normal unlock hours. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.

✗ **Visits Status:** Visits not currently operating. Legal visits recommenced on 20 March 2023.

AROHATA PRISON

✓ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating within normal unlock hours, with prisoners unlocked between 8am and 5pm daily. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.

✓ **Visits Status:** Visits operating with limited availability (Sunday visits only).



CHRISTCHURCH MEN'S PRISON

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** Normal routines in operation, however at times regimes are restricted regimes with limited unlock across the site due to reduced staffing numbers. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ⚠ **Visits Status:** Visits are offered at a reduced capacity, with prisoners being offered one hour per fortnight, alternating by low and high security.

CHRISTCHURCH WOMEN'S PRISON

- ⚠ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating within normal unlock hours when staffing permits between 9am -5:30pm. Rolling unlocks are being used regularly, particularly at weekends. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ✔ **Visits Status:** Visits operating – Normal visiting days.

ROLLESTON PRISON

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating within normal unlock hours. During weekdays, prisoners are unlocked between 7am and 7pm. During weekends unlock is between 8am and 6pm. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ✔ **Visits Status:** Visits operating.

OCF

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating with normal unlock hours. High security prisoners are unlocked between 8am and 5pm. Low security prisoners are unlocked between 7am and 7pm. Due to staffing shortages, prisoners on occasion receive less than the normal time out of their cells. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ✔ **Visits Status:** Visits operating – Normal visiting days (Monday to Friday).

INVERCARGILL PRISON

- ✔ **Unlock Regimes:** All units are operating within normal unlock hours. Regimes are determined each day depending on staffing resource. There were no centrally reported denials of one hour physical exercise at the site for the week ending 28 January 2024.
- ✔ **Visits Status:** Visits operating – Friday—Sunday (inclusive)