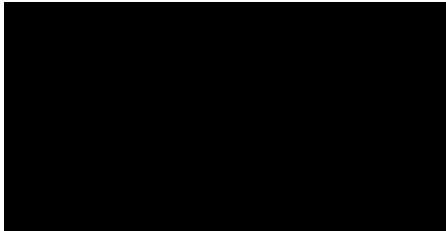



22 November 2022

C158598



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 23 September 2022 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information relating to a previous response from Corrections (ref. C154358) and face-to-face visits at prisons. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

As has been widely reported in recent months, Corrections has been facing staffing shortages across many prisons, impacting our ability to fully resume access to in-person visits at some sites.

Resuming face-to-face visits for family and friends is a priority, but the safety of staff, people in prisons and visitors to sites must always be paramount. We can only resume activities, such as visits, where we know it will not compromise people's safety. Face-to-face visits are currently running at fourteen of eighteen prison sites as at 21 November 2022. We are also working to resume visits at a number of other prisons next month.

Corrections is making a concerted effort to recruit, train, and retain. This includes strengthening our recruitment processes, improving our onboarding processes, implementing new rosters which provide our staff with better work/life balance and help them to avoid fatigue, and continuously working to improve staff safety. We are actively working to recruit new Corrections Officers across the country and staff have also been carrying out recruitment activities in their local communities. We have seen a significant increase in the number of applications nationally, with almost 1,600 applications to be a Corrections Officer over the last three months. We currently have 830 live applications.

Information has previously been provided to you on 28 October 2022 (ref. C158033) relating to the network rebalancing plans and the movement of some women from Arohata Prison to Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility (ARWCF) or Christchurch Women's Prison (CWP). This has allowed for the redeployment of staff to assist at Rimutaka Prison.

Face-to-face visits were first temporarily suspended when the country entered Alert Level 4 lockdown in March 2020 and remained suspended throughout Alert Level 3, in line with the COVID-19 guidelines. Face-to-face visits resumed at all prisons under Alert Level 2 in May 2020 and remained in place until August 2021, with the exception of the Auckland Region, which spent periods of time in and out of Alert Level 3.

As COVID-19 cases in prisons have now dropped considerably across the country, we are now looking at how best manage the prison population across the entire prison estate to ensure the best use of our units and staff resources.

You requested:

- *All internal and external communications sent and received by Corrections regarding the OIA request by me, [REDACTED], on July 6 2022*

A general principal has emerged from the Ombudsman that consultation documents and drafts of OIA requests are withheld under section 9(2)(g)(i). Disclosure of this type of information would likely inhibit advisors or officials from expressing or recording free and frank advice on OIA requests in the future.

This part of your request is, therefore, refused under 9(2)(g)(i) of the OIA, to protect the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the Crown or members of an organisation or officers and employees of any department or organisation in the course of their duty.

We do not believe there are any considerations under section 9(1) of the OIA rendering it desirable in the public interest to make the information available which outweigh the reasons for withholding.

For further information on the use of section 9(2)(g)(i), you may wish to refer to the following links: <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources/request-comments-generated-during-oia-decision-making-process> and <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources/request-draft-responses-oia-requests>.

- *All internal and external communications, briefings, aides, memos, notes of phone conversations, sent and received by the Department of Corrections regarding face-to-face visits since July 6 2022.*
- *In particular; any communications sent to and received from any of the 18 prisons across the country regarding face-to-face visits since July 6 2022.*

We have interpreted your request for all internal and external communications, briefings, aides, memos, notes of phone conversations, sent and received by the Department of Corrections National Office regarding visit restrictions, including the network configuration, since 6 July 2022.

Communications relating to network reconfiguration, including visit restrictions, have been attached as Appendix One.

We recently carried out a search to identify all email communication within scope of a similar OIA request using the keywords 'network configuration' 'network consolidation' and 'balancing plan'. The different options for these plans begun around 18 July 2022 and this search located over 33,000 emails, which is likely to be over 60,000 pages. These results would require manual assessment to establish what was within scope of your request and assess them in accordance with the OIA.

Accordingly, your request for '*internal and external communications*' relating to visit restrictions, including '*any communications sent to and received from any of the 18 prisons across the country regarding face-to-face visits*' is refused under section 18(f) of the OIA, as it would require substantial collation or research.

In accordance with section 18A and 18B of the OIA we have considered whether fixing a charge, extending the time limit or asking you to refine or amend your request would enable us to provide a response. If you are able to refine your request to a specific time period or other key search words, we may be able to consider your request further.

Corrections consulted with the Minister's Office and confirmed that the briefings and aides memoire in scope of this request were released to you on 25 October 2022 by the Office of Hon Kelvin Davis.

The part of your request for '*notes of phone conversations*' is broad in scope as the request as currently framed would relate to all staff. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the OIA, as it would require substantial collation or research.

However, we have narrowed the scope to three individuals, who were involved in changes to the visits and the network reconfiguration, Leigh Marsh then acting National Commissioner, Topia Rameka Deputy Chief Executive Māori, and Brigid Kean acting Deputy National Commissioner and COVID-19 Response Manager.

One written note relating to Arohata Prison visits from Brigid Kean was determined to be in scope of your request. This note has been included in Appendix One.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

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



Neil Beales
Acting National Commissioner