



CABINET OFFICE

8 June 2021

Wendy McGuinness  
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Reference: OIA-2020/21-0576

Dear Wendy McGuinness

**Official Information Act request relating to government priorities since 2006**

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 7 May 2021. You requested:

*“Question 1: Is it correct to refer to the ‘priorities’ as the ‘government priorities of the New Zealand government’? If incorrect, please explain and suggest a better term? Note: This is particularly important given it is the title of the working paper.*

*Question 2: Is the supporting table (Table 1) conceptually accurate in stating ‘government priorities’ since 2006? Please explain. Note: The relevant references (with links) can be found on page 13 of the initial draft. Each year we reference the relevant Budget Speech.*

*Question 3: Are there other places in the machinery of government where high-level goals, priorities and/or objectives are listed in a regular and consistent manner? If yes, please explain what these are and where we can find them?*

*Question 4: DPMC’s website (found here) states that the Cabinet Priorities Committee is: ‘Responsible for the overall co-ordination and delivery of the government’s priorities’. We have five sub-questions:*

- (a) When was this committee established?*
- (b) Are you aware of any other equivalent committees being in operation at any time since 2006? If yes, please explain?*
- (c) How does the committee define ‘priorities’, ‘budget priorities’, ‘core goals’, ‘critical goals’ and ‘major strategic issues’ – and is there a hierarchy? Note: We found some speeches failed to draw a clear distinction between these terms.*
- (d) Is the committee responsible for overseeing how government department strategies (GDSs) are implemented? Please explain. Note: the Institute has prepared a GDS Index here, and the tentative list of GDSs in operation as at 31 December 2020 can be found here. We are trying to find out who in government has oversight of GDSs. Can you advise?*

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- (e) *Is there a working relationship between the committee and the new 'Implementation Unit' established inside DPMC? Please explain? (Please also see question 6 below on the new Unit).*

*Question 5: In our view, Labour's manifesto to keep New Zealand moving is not included as a government strategy as it is outside of government and simply drives ministers' decision making. Do you agree?*

*Question 6: Given the climate emergency, why is there no Cabinet Committee focused specifically on climate change? In addition, please explain how the Minister of Climate Change is able to progress his ideas given he is not a member of the (ENV) Cabinet Environment, Energy and Climate Committee?*

*Question 7: The government recently established the 'Implementation Unit' within DPMC. The Pre-Budget speech (4 May 2021) states:*

*For this term of Government we have **three core goals**. In addition to keeping New Zealanders safe from COVID-19, we are focused on accelerating our economic recovery and addressing the big three foundational challenges, housing affordability, climate change and child wellbeing.*

*The Government is determined that we will deliver on these core priorities. To that end the Prime Minister has asked me to lead the establishment an Implementation Unit based in her department.*

*The Unit will be funded through Budget 2021 and will monitor and support implementation of a small number of critical initiatives, particularly where multiple agencies are involved in the work. This includes areas such as mental health, infrastructure, housing and **climate change mitigation**. The Unit will report to me as Deputy Prime Minister, and will engage closely with Minister's offices.*

*At a time, in the wake of COVID-19, where the Government is playing a much greater role in supporting the economy and investing for the future, it is crucial that we ensure that we are getting value for money from every dollar of spending, and that across the public service initiatives are being delivered in a way that supports our economic recovery.*

- (a) *Please clarify what are the 'three core goals' mentioned above (in bold underline)? Are they, for example, housing affordability, climate change, child wellbeing, COVID-19 or the economic recovery?*
- (b) *Can you provide examples of the critical initiatives for each of the specific areas mentioned in the pre-budget speech: mental health, infrastructure, housing and climate change mitigation?*
- (c) *The Minister mentioned that 'climate change mitigation' was one the key areas (see bold), but why was 'adaptation' not mentioned?*
- (d) *Will the new Unit focus on (i) all, (ii) some or (iii) none of the 199 GDSs currently in operation as at 31 December 2020?"*

As advised by email on 19 May 2021, several questions included in your query do not constitute a request for official information. Officials at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) are not able to peer review aspects of the report.

We further note that DPMC cannot release information it does not hold and there is no obligation under the Act for DPMC to create it. The following questions are therefore refused under identified sections of the Act:

Question	Section of the Act	Reason for refusal
1, 2, 5, 6 and 7(c)	2(1) official information (a)	Not official information

3 and 4(c)	18(g)	The information requested is not held by DPMC and the person dealing with the request has no grounds for believing that the information is either— (i) held by another agency; or (ii) connected more closely with the functions of another agency.
4(e)	18(e)	The document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.
7 (a) and (b)	18(d)	The information requested is publicly available in the 2020 Speech from the Throne and Minister of Finance’s pre-Budget speech
7(d)	9(2)(f)(iv)	To maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials.

In response to questions 4(a) and (b), the structure, terms of reference, chair and membership of each Cabinet committee are determined by the Prime Minister. The Cabinet Priorities Committee was established in 2017 by Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern as a forum to consider priority matters. There have been similar Cabinet committees in the past that have focused on issues at a strategic level, for example the most recent National administration chose to have a Cabinet Strategy Committee.

In response to question 4(d), the Terms of Reference for the Cabinet Priorities Committee are available on the DPMC website: <https://dpmc.govt.nz/cabinet-committees/cpc-cabinet-priorities-committee>. See Chapter 3 of the Cabinet Manual for information on the roles and responsibilities for priorities and strategic direction of government departments. We note that Ministers decide both the direction of, and the priorities for, their departments (paragraph 3.7) and officials are responsible for serving the aims and objectives of Ministers by developing and implementing policy and strategy (paragraph 3.9(b)).

We further note in respect of question 6 that the terms of reference for the Cabinet Environment, Energy and Climate Committee is to “consider strategic and policy matters relating to the environment, climate change, sustainable energy use, natural resources, and resource management”. The Cabinet Office Circular (20) 8 *Labour Government, with Support from the Green Party: Consultation and Operating Arrangements*, sets out the arrangements regarding attendance of Green Party Ministers at Cabinet committees in paragraphs 12 to 14. A copy of this circular is available on our website: <https://dpmc.govt.nz/publications/co-20-8-labour-government-support-green-party-consultation-and-operating-arrangements>

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

We do not intend to publish this response on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet’s website.

Yours sincerely

