



MINISTRY OF  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
*Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora*

Date: 31 October 2007


Security Level: UNCLASSIFIED

Report to: Incoming Minister for Social Development and Employment  
Incoming Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector

**BRIEFING ON MATTERS REQUIRING YOUR ATTENTION 31 OCTOBER TO 16  
NOVEMBER 2007**

Executive Summary

- 1 This briefing sets out the matters that will require your attention over the next two weeks in your new portfolio responsibilities and alerts you to the issues, papers and parliamentary business items that will require your consideration over this period.
- 2 These matters are listed under four categories:
  - Media Issues
  - Events and Launches
  - Matters in the House
  - Papers for your action (attached as Appendix One).
- 3 In each category, issues are listed in order of priority. We have provided you with information on:
  - the nature of the issue
  - what action is required and by when
  - the support the Ministry will provide you and your Office
  - the broader context and environment in which the issue fits.
- 4 We will provide you with a further briefing, outlining issues that your predecessor had intended to address before the Christmas recess, for your consideration.

  
Peter Hughes  
Chief Executive

31 OCTOBER, 2007  
Date

## Media Issues

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- 5 There are some on-going media issues that may require statements from you in the next two weeks.

## Household Labour Force Survey

- 6 On 8 November the quarterly HLFS figures will be released by Statistics New Zealand. Recent HLFS results have been very positive, with record high levels of labour force participation and record low levels of unemployment.
- 7 In the past, the Minister for Social Development and Employment has released a press statement commenting on these results and explaining how Government and Ministry initiatives have contributed to them.
- 8 You will receive a written briefing prior to the release of the HLFS figures, providing both the Ministry's and the Department of Labour's predictions on the results. In this briefing we will also provide you with up-to-date information on benefit numbers and trends, and progress on key initiatives relating to employment.
- 9 You will also receive a confidential oral briefing from Statistics New Zealand, just prior to the public release of the findings.

## The Social Report 2007

- 10 *The Social Report 2007* was launched on 18 October. *The Social Report* uses a set of statistical indicators to monitor trends across 10 "domains", or areas of people's lives. Together these domains provide a picture of wellbeing and quality of life in New Zealand.
- 11 *The Social Report 2007* is the sixth in the annual series.
- 12 Each year, the findings of *The Social Report* are used as the basis for inquiries and statements from journalists, researchers and opposition Members of Parliament. These statements generally continue for some time after the release of the report. We are expecting that this will be the case again this year as we will be hosting regional presentations across New Zealand in November to highlight the national and regional social reports.
- 13 A number of Ministers have been briefed on the findings of the report, and are prepared to address specific queries for their portfolios (for example issues relating to Maori or Pacific people). As Minister for Social Development and Employment you are the main spokesperson for the report.
- 14 Your Office can make available to you the package of support material provided to your predecessor. This includes a summary of key findings and a question and answer sheet. We can provide you with a background briefing on *The Social Report* and the key issues emerging from *The Social Report 2007*, if required.

### **Bartlett False Identity Fraud**

- 15 Alleged benefit fraudster Brooke Bartlett will appear in court in Auckland for a depositions hearing on 5 November. Bartlett is defending charges brought against him by the Ministry. The hearing is set down to run for two weeks. He is charged with establishing and using 17 false beneficiary identities to obtain Sickness and/or Domestic Purposes Benefits of approximately \$570,000 over a period of four years and three months.
- 16 The Ministry has prepared a holding statement, but is unable to comment on the facts of the case while it is before the Courts. This is consistent with our approach so far in relation to other benefit fraud cases. We will liaise with your Office as information comes to hand.
- 17 This follows on from the recent sentencing of Wayne Patterson, who committed New Zealand's largest ever benefit fraud, stealing \$3.4 million in benefit payments using 123 false identities. There was significant media interest in this. The Ministry held a press conference at which it released all documents that otherwise would have been made available under the Official Information Act. Your predecessor also released a statement about the Patterson case.
- 18 The Ministry was contacted by the Herald on Sunday today. The Herald on Sunday is doing a three page feature on the Patterson case. We expect this piece to focus on the nature of the offending and the Ministry's role in detecting it. The journalist has said that he considers that the Ministry did a good job. The Ministry have offered to provide an interview with key people involved in the case. We will keep your Office informed as this issue progresses.
- 19 At this stage it is planned that Ministry officials will deal with any media inquiries. We will work with your Office if you wish to make any statements on the Bartlett or Patterson cases.

### **No Surprises Agreement**

- 20 Under the Ministry's no surprises arrangement with Ministers, we will provide you with details on all information we intend to release, in response to requests for information. This includes information released through media releases, reports and evaluations and responses to Official Information Act requests.

### *Media Issues*

- 21 Each day, the Ministry's Media team produce a *Media Log*. This includes all inquiries received on that day, a list of issues being addressed, upcoming launches and events, and information that has previously been released that has not yet resulted in a television piece, radio item and/or newspaper article. The *Media Log* will be provided to your Office by 5 pm each day.

### *Official Information Act releases*

- 22 There are nine Chief Executive OIA responses due to be released in the next two weeks. Draft responses and a report to you are provided to your Office four days prior to their release. On average we respond to 400 OIA requests per year.

## Events and Launches

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### Social Development

- 23 The Ministry's Private Secretaries have ensured that there are no events or launches that you are committed to attend, during your first two weeks as Minister for Social Development and Employment.

#### *Launch of the National Life Course Research Centre*

- 24 Your predecessor was scheduled to speak at the launch of the University of Otago National Centre for Lifecourse Research, which will be held in the Grand Hall at Parliament from 5.30 pm to 7.00 pm on 19 November (formalities begin at 6.00 pm).
- 25 The National Centre for Lifecourse Research is a collaborative initiative, co-directed by Professor Richie Poulton, Director of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (DMHDS) and Professor David Fergusson, Executive Director of the Christchurch Health and Development Study (CHDS).
- 26 Your predecessor was scheduled to speak first at the launch, followed briefly by Otago University's Research Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Geoff White, then by Professor Richie Poulton, then by Dr Karen Hartshorn, Director of Translational Research at the Centre. Karen is likely to be MC for the event.
- 27 We will provide your Office with draft speech notes and a full report on the event and the attendees, if you choose to attend. In addition, officials can brief you prior to the event.

### Community and Voluntary Sector

#### *Events*

- 28 As Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector, you will be invited to speak at Annual General Meetings and events being held across the sector. Your predecessor had agreed to speak at the following event:
- 8 November - *Volunteering Conference in Wellington*. This is the inaugural conference on the theme of Optimising the Energy of Volunteering. The conference will be held at Te Papa. Your predecessor had agreed to give an opening address from 10.00 am. The Department of Internal Affairs will provide you with speaking notes.
  - The Conference is for 100-120 senior practitioners, decision-makers and policy-makers in the charitable, community and voluntary sector in New Zealand.

## Matters in the House

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### Select Committee

#### *Select Committee Hearing*

- 30 The Ministry is scheduled to appear before the Social Services Select Committee from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm on 14 November, for the 2006/2007 financial review. The two hours will be split into one hour reviewing matters relating to Child, Youth and Family and one hour reviewing the rest of the Ministry's activities. You are not required to attend this hearing, although you may wish for someone from your Office to sit in. The Director of the Office of the Chief Executive will liaise with your Office on this.

#### *Select Committee Written Questions*

- 31 We are responding to 256 written questions from the Committee. These responses will be provided to your Office by 5.00 pm on 5 November. Responses to written questions are due to the Committee by 12 November. We are happy to receive comments or advice from your Office on our responses before this date.
- 32 In addition to the draft responses, we will provide your Office with a list of *Hot Topics*. The *Hot Topics* document outlines perennial issues of interest to the Committee, and the Ministry's key messages and statistics in response. The *Hot Topics* list forms the basis of material used by senior Ministry staff to address questions at the Select Committee hearing.
- 33 The majority of the Select Committee's questions are generic in nature, for example questions on staff numbers, contractors and consultants and expenditure. Some questions deal with specific issues that relate to the Ministry's activities. These questions will be highlighted to your Office, and we will provide further contextual information on any risks or follow up action that may arise from them.

#### *Questions for Oral answer*

- 34 The House is sitting from Tuesday 13 November to Thursday 15 November. On average, your portfolio receives one Oral Question per House sitting day.
- 35 Judith Collins, National party Welfare Spokesperson has to date asked most of the Opposition questions relating to your portfolio. In this parliamentary session Social Development questions tend to be late on the list (Questions seven to twelve). Social Development questions have focussed on:
- Growth in Sickness and Invalid's Benefit numbers
  - Benefit Debt, including growth in the debt portfolio, how debt is categorised and debt arising from benefit fraud
  - Growth in the numbers of staff working at the Ministry
  - Progress on Single Core Benefit.
- 36 These issues, along with a number of others, are included in the *Hot Topics* fact sheets, which will be provided to your Office.

### Legislative proposals

- 37 There is one Bill in the name of Minister for Social Development and Employment which may require your attendance in the House during the period to 16 November. This is the *Social Assistance (Debt Minimisation and Prevention) Amendment Bill*.
- 38 The Bill was introduced on 18 July, read a first time on 7 August and referred to the Committee. On 19 September and 9 October officials briefed the Committee on the Bill. The Ministry presented its Departmental Report to the Committee on 17 October. The Committee deliberated on the Bill on 24 October and we now await their report back to the House. Three days after this report is tabled the second reading (and later Committee of the Whole house debate) could then occur at any time while the House is sitting.
- 39 The Bill will enable the better detection of frauds in the social security and student allowance systems, and improve the prevention and recovery of debts by broadening data matching through amendments to the Corrections Act 2004, the Customs and Excise Act 1996, and the Injury Prevention, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2001.
- 40 We can brief you on Bills being lead by other Ministers that relate to the broader Social Development portfolio.

### Papers

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- 41 Attached as Appendix One is a list of Papers which are scheduled for action by you.
- 42 These are catergorsied into:
  - Cabinet Papers already lodged with Cabinet Office
  - Draft Cabinet Papers currently out for Ministerial consultation
  - Draft Cabinet Papers coming to you for Ministerial consultation in the next two weeks
  - Papers coming to you.
- 43 The Appendix provides you with a brief description of each paper, its current status, relevant due dates, and the action required by you. We have also indicated what support we have provided, or are able to provide at your request.

Appendix One

Entire Appendix withheld