

Aide-mémoire



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Cabinet paper

Date: 10 June 2026 **Security level:** Cabinet Sensitive

For: Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Social Development and Employment

File Reference: REP/26/6/428

Children's Commissioner: Appointment

Cabinet Committee	Cabinet Appointments and Honours Committee (APH)
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Date of meeting	4.00pm Tuesday 16 June 2026
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Purpose of meeting	You are asking APH to note your intention to recommend the Governor-General appoint Jane Searle as Children's Commissioner (the Commissioner).
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Talking points to support the APH discussion are appended.

Background	• The Commissioner's current term expires on 31 July 2026. As an independent Crown entity, the Commissioner is appointed by the Governor-General on your recommendation as responsible Minister. • The Commissioner went through structural change in July 2025 as part of the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Legislation Amendment Act 2025 (the Amendment Act). The current Commissioner's one-year appointment was part of transitional provisions in the Amendment Act. • Given the changes the entity has been through over the last three years (from Office of the Children's Commissioner to Children and Young People's Commission, and now to Children's Commissioner), a full, open appointment process has been undertaken to support public confidence in the process and the appointee.
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- The Children's Commissioner Act 2022 (the Act) requires that, in reaching a decision on who to recommend to the Governor-General, you must have regard to:
 - candidates' knowledge and experience in children's and young people's rights and issues, knowledge and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori knowledge and experience in tikanga Māori
 - the required skills and leadership experience to carry out the role
 - the recommendation of a nomination panel that has reviewed applications.
 - The Act also requires applications include an endorsement from a relevant organisation specified in the Children's Commissioner (Relevant Agencies) Regulations 2023.
 - The above elements were integrated into the standard process set out in the Public Service Commission appointment guidelines. The process for the current appointment started in December 2025 with a two-month application period involving broad advertising.
 - Ten applications were received, all with relevant endorsements. The applications were considered by the nomination panel – consisting of Sacha O'Dea, Iona Holsted and Wayne Blissett. After interviewing a shortlist of four candidates the panel provided advice noting three candidates were considered suitable for appointment.

Recommended appointment**Expertise and experience**

- Following your due consideration of the candidates, in line with the statutory process, you have selected Ms Searle to recommend for appointment.
 - Ms Searle has been with Child Matters, a nationwide child safety training charity, for over 11 years. Nine of those years has been as its Chief Executive.
 - Her prior employment experience includes:
 - leadership roles with fraud investigation firms
 - over 4 years as a Detective with New Zealand Police's Child Abuse Investigation Team
 - as a barrister and solicitor.
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- Ms Searle has also held a range of governance and advisory board roles and contributed to specialist sector working groups.
 - Ms Searle demonstrates:
 - a senior level of children's sector experience and knowledge
 - a strong ability to frame advocacy to support practical results and then engagements and influence to maximise that advocacy's impact
 - the overall knowledge, skills, and experience and required for the highly visible role as New Zealand's national advocate for children and young people.

Appointment term

- Members of an independent Crown entity can be appointed for terms of up to 5 years. Given the importance of continuity after a period of organisational change, you are proposing Ms Searle is appointed for a full 5-year term.

Conflicts of interest and probity checks

- Ms Searle completed conflict of interest checks with no declared conflicts.
- Probity checks, including speaking with the Chair of Child Matters as Ms Searle's current employer, were completed with no issues identified.

Ministerial consultation

- Ministerial consultation on the draft APH paper was completed with no feedback.

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Responsible manager: Aaron Baggenstos, Manager, Strategy, Performance and Crown Entities

Talking points for the Cabinet Appointment and Honours Committee – Proposed Children’s Commissioner appointee

An open application process, including all statutory considerations, has been followed to support public confidence in the appointment

- The Children's Commissioner has been through two major structural changes over the last 3 years.
- On 1 July 2023 the Office of the Children’s Commissioner became the Children and Young People’s Commissioner with a board of Commissioners.
- Last year, with the strengthening of Oranga Tamariki system oversight, I returned the entity to a single Children’s Commissioner, to make it crystal clear to children and young people who their advocate is.
- Given these changes and the transition arrangements in place since August 2025, I considered it important a full, open appointment process was undertaken for the role of Children’s Commissioner to support public confidence in the process and the appointee.
- In terms of that process, as the APH paper notes there are specific process elements required by the Children's Commissioner Act that were incorporated into the standard Crown entity appointment approach.

The proposed appointee has the knowledge, expertise and mana for the key role of New Zealand’s children and young people’s advocate

- Having fulfilled the statutory steps, I am proposing Jane Searle be appointed as Children’s Commissioner for a full 5-year term.
- Jane has been with Child Matters, a nationwide child safety training charity, for over 11 years. Nine of those years has been as its Chief Executive. Earlier in her career Jane was a Detective with New Zealand Police’s Child Abuse Investigation Team for over 4 years.
- Through her professional positions and her roles on a range of community boards and specialist advisory groups, Jane has a deep understanding of the issues faced by children and young people. She has a demonstrated ability to frame advocacy to support practical results and then prioritise her engagements and influence to maximise that advocacy’s impact.
- Jane has the senior experience, knowledge and skills, along with the mana, to act as our nation’s lead children’s advocate and head a Crown entity tasked with a range of children’s sector oversight functions.

Checks have been completed with no issues identified

- Probity checks and conflict of interest disclosures have been completed for Jane with no issues raised.
- There are well-established conflict management processes in place if any interests do arise during Jane’s term.