DEPARTMENT OF THE
PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET
TE TARI O TE PIRIMIA ME TE KOMITI MATUA

29 June 2026

Ref: OIA-2025/26-0779

[redacted]

Tēnā koe [redacted],

Official Information Act request relating to Decision making processes used by elected representatives

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request, which was received by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) on 1 June 2026. You requested:

> *This request concerns the processes used to ensure that elected representatives, including Ministers, Members of Parliament, councillors, and other decision-makers, are adequately informed before making decisions affecting the public.*
>
> *1. Any policies, guidance documents, manuals, protocols, or training materials that describe the responsibilities of elected representatives when reviewing reports, Cabinet papers, briefing papers, consultation documents, or other material before making decisions.*
>
> *2. Any policies or procedures requiring elected representatives to confirm, certify, acknowledge, or otherwise indicate that they have read, reviewed, or understood material presented to them before voting, approving, or endorsing a decision.*
>
> *3. Any guidance provided to officials regarding the preparation of summaries, executive summaries, recommendations, or briefing papers for elected representatives.*
>
> *4. Any records, policies, or procedures that address circumstances where elected representatives rely upon advice from officials, consultants, contractors, or subject-matter experts.*
>
> *5. Any documents describing the safeguards used to ensure that decisions are informed, particularly where significant expenditure is involved; emergency powers are exercised; public health measures are implemented; statutory powers are exercised; or rights, freedoms, property interests, or public services may be affected.*
>
> *6. Any audits, reviews, assessments, reports, lessons-learned documents, internal evaluations, or external reviews undertaken since 1 January 2020 regarding the quality of decision-making, adequacy of information provided to decision-makers, briefing processes, governance failures, reliance upon official advice, or risks arising from incomplete information.*
>
> *7. Any policies, guidance, or records concerning situations where an elected representative later states that they were unaware of, did not read, did not recall, or did not understand information contained within material presented to them before a decision was made.*
>
> *8. Any records identifying the legal, administrative, or governance responsibilities that remain with elected representatives when they rely upon advice prepared by officials.*

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9. Any documents describing how accountability is maintained where decisions are based substantially upon recommendations prepared by permanent officials rather than elected representatives themselves.

10. Any guidance regarding the distinction between advice provided by officials, decisions made by elected representatives, and responsibility for the consequences of those decisions.

11. Please provide any documents, guidance, reviews, or discussions since 1 January 2020 concerning information overload, briefing volume, decision fatigue, or the practical ability of elected representatives to review all material presented before making decisions.

If any part of this request is considered too broad, I request reasonable assistance under section 13 of the Official Information Act to refine the request rather than refusing it."

We have interpreted your request as seeking information held by DPMC that relates to the processes, guidance, responsibilities, and accountability arrangements associated with decision-making by elected representatives within New Zealand's central government. With the exception of Parts 6 and 11, your request does not specify a timeframe.

Refinement sought
Given the breadth of your request, DPMC wrote to you on 11 June 2026 to invite you to refine the scope of information sought. We followed up again on 17 June 2026. As we did not receive a response from you, we have proceeded to consider your request as originally framed.

Part 3
The Policy Project's Policy Quality Framework sets the public sector standard for quality policy advice. Agencies use the framework when preparing advice for Ministers, including Cabinet papers. The framework is complemented by a peer-review worksheet for policy papers, which supports internal quality assurance and effective policy advice. The framework relates to the preparation of advice by officials for decision-makers; it does not alter the respective roles of Ministers and officials in relation to decisions.

Part 10
The Government decides public policy and advises the King or Governor-General, while the Public Service provides advice to the Government and implements the decisions of the Government of the day.

As noted in our email of 11 June 2026, key authoritative guidance on Cabinet processes and decision-making is publicly available:

- Cabinet Manual: https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-business-units/cabinet-office/supporting-work-cabinet/cabinet-manual.
- Cabinet Office Circulars: https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications?field_cassbase_content_owner_target_id=All&field_cassbase_resource_category_tid=805&field_issue_date_value=All&field_pmc_programme_target_id=All.
- CabGuide: https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/publications/cabguide.

These sources set out the relevant expectations, roles, and processes relating to Cabinet decision-making, the provision of advice, and the responsibilities of Ministers and officials.

Information to be refused
To assess whether the information requested could be made available without substantial collation or research, DPMC undertook an initial scoping exercise using keyword searches across our information management systems. While some searches returned large volumes of material and others returned little or no information, each potentially relevant record would need to be manually reviewed to determine whether it is within scope and whether it can be released. Accordingly, I have determined that the information sought in Parts 1, 2, 4–9, 11 of your request, as well as the remainder of Parts 3 and 10 not answered above, cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. These parts of your request are therefore refused under section 18(f) of the Act.

Before reaching this decision, I considered whether fixing a charge or extending the time limit for responding would enable the request to be granted. I do not consider that either option would sufficiently reduce the substantial collation and research required to identify and assess the information captured by these parts of your request. I also consulted with you about refining the scope of your request. As we did not receive a response from you, I remain satisfied that section 18(f) applies.

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

This response will be published on the DPMC website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Nāku noa, nā



Alan Cassidy
Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate