



Briefing on long-term insights briefings

Second interim report of the Governance and Administration Committee

August 2023

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Ian McKelvie
Chairperson

Briefing on long-term insights briefings

Recommendation

The Governance and Administration Committee has considered a briefing about long-term insights briefings, and recommends that the House take note of its second interim report.

About long-term insights briefings

The Public Service Act 2020 introduced the requirement for every Public Service department to produce a long-term insights briefing every three years.

Long-term insights briefings are designed to make information available to the public about medium- and long-term trends, risks, and opportunities that affect New Zealand. They include information, impartial analysis, and policy options for responding to these matters.¹ The briefings are intended to promote the long-term stewardship role of the public service and to mainstream “futures thinking”² across government departments.

A briefing may set out the strengths and weaknesses of policy options without indicating a preference for any particular policy option. The Act requires that the briefings be prepared independently from Ministers; they are not government policy. Long-term insights briefings may be prepared jointly by two or more chief executives as long as each of the departments meets the requirements of the Act.

Each Minister must present a copy of the briefing to the House of Representatives as soon as is reasonably practicable after receiving it. The briefing is then scrutinised by the relevant select committee, which has 90 working days to report to the House on the briefing.

Purpose of this interim report

We published a first interim report at the start of the long-term insights briefing process in May 2022.³ This second interim report presents feedback on the first iteration of long-term insights briefings, provides comments for future improvement of both the content and process of the briefings, and sets out the next steps for the Governance and Administration Committee of the 54th Parliament to consider.

¹ Public Service Act 2020, Schedule 6, clause 8.

² “Futures thinking” can be defined as the process of “identifying key trends and uncertainties and probable, possible and preferred futures and their implications for the present, so that strategies, policies and plans can be made more anticipatory, adaptable and robust in the future that eventually emerges”. Menzies, M (2022) “Long-term Insights Briefings: a futures perspective”, Policy Quarterly, 18 (4), p 56.

³ The first interim report is available on the [Parliament website](#).

Update since the last interim report

As of August 2023, all 19 planned long-term insights briefings had been completed. All have been presented to Parliament and referred to a select committee for examination⁴. Two remained to be examined at the time this report was written.

Four long-term insights briefings were joint briefings, involving between two and seven agencies. The briefings are available on the website of the Public Service Commission.⁵

Observations on the long-term insights briefings so far

We examined the content of the long-term insights briefings and how departments carried out their briefings. The content of the briefings varied depending on the subject matter and an agency's approach to dealing with it. We identified the main drivers in deciding on a topic and assessed the added value of joint briefings.

Briefings covered a wide range of topics and approaches

Some briefings covered very broad topics within the sector. For example, the Ministry for the Environment explored issues and options for how New Zealand could secure a sustainable future for both the land, and future generations. Other departments looked into a more specific, emerging challenge within their area of responsibility. For instance, the Ministry of Transport chose to delve into the implications of automated vehicles operating on New Zealand roads, which it expects will have a transformational effect on the transport system.

The topics of briefings were often refined by feedback from public consultation. For instance, the title of the briefing on youth employment was changed from "Youth at risk of limited employment" to "Preparing all young people for satisfying and rewarding working lives". This reflects a shift towards a strengths-based approach, which focuses on people's strengths rather than their perceived deficits or the risks they are facing. This view was expressed by stakeholders and the public during the consultation period.

For cross-agency and sector-wide briefings, the topics were usually decided by looking at the convergence of the work of several agencies in the sector and the areas of shared responsibility. For instance, the justice sector investigated the topic of imprisonment as it sits at the crossroads of all the justice sector agencies that were involved in the briefing. For the same reason, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Ministry for Women chose to concentrate on "preparing all young people for satisfying and rewarding lives".

The added value of cross-agency briefings

Four long-term insights briefings were completed jointly by two or more government departments. We believe that joint briefings are an effective way of looking into an emerging challenge from different standpoints.

Five agencies within the justice sector published a joint briefing about imprisonment. The Justice Committee considered this briefing and highlighted the value of cross-agency

⁴ Select committees' reports on the long-term insights briefings are available on the [Parliament website](#).

⁵ <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/publications/long-term-insights-briefings/published-briefings/>

collaboration in the justice sector. It praised the analysis of long-term trends, risks, and opportunities that came out of the departments' joint efforts.

We also found that some briefings covered similar topics from different standpoints. For instance, while the Public Service Commission's briefing explored "public participation in government into the future", the Department of Internal Affairs looked at "how community participation and decision-making can be better enabled by technology". These are complementary entry points into the same overarching challenge. We believe that increased consultation across agencies would lead to fewer, more in-depth briefings.

However, some departments that decided to collaborate on a given topic did not provide a rationale behind their decision beyond the obvious overlapping of their responsibility areas. We encourage departments to provide systematic insights into the process of choosing to work together and deciding on a topic of common interest in the next round of long-term insights briefings.

Parliamentary scrutiny of long-term insights briefings

All long-term insights briefings were presented to Parliament for examination by select committees. Select committees held public hearings with chief executives to discuss their briefings.

Long-term insights briefings drive futures thinking in the public service

We commend the clear way in which long-term insights briefings presented relevant information about trends, risks, challenges, and opportunities in the chosen topic and how they could lead to different scenarios in the future depending on policies that are implemented until then. Departments remained mindful of their stewardship role in advancing longer-term planning and policies. We acknowledge the considerable effort that has been put into preparing this first round of long-term insights briefings.

Briefings should address strategic nationwide issues

The process for choosing a topic most often involved internal and external discussions about the future, and identifying areas where each department can add the most value. Submissions from the public and stakeholders often narrowed down the topic of a briefing from a pre-established list of topics determined by the department.

To decide the topic of its briefing, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment tested six potential trends that could be further explored. It eventually settled on two, based on consultation feedback. MBIE's expertise added value to the topic under study.

However, we believe there are higher-priority long-term issues that the briefings in this round did not address. Although some briefings covered strategic issues that fell within the scope of what the Act requires, others investigated research questions that should be considered in the normal course of departments' activities.

Unequal levels of public consultation and engagement

Most departments conducted one or two rounds of public consultation, as required by the Public Service Act.⁶ They included individuals, stakeholders representing their interests and communities, and experts on the subject matter. Some committees expressed disappointment with the low level of engagement with Māori, youth, migrant, and ethnic communities, despite public consultation being a requirement of the Act.

While most briefings recorded low levels of public engagement (between 20 and 50 submissions from the public), some—notably the Justice sector briefing—received over 1,500 individual responses to online surveys. We encourage departments to share best practices and useful tools to improve public engagement in the next round of long-term insights briefings.

We found that the departments that fully engaged with the public often modified or clarified the scope of their briefings accordingly. The briefing on “Preparing all young people for satisfying and rewarding lives” published detailed accounts of the public consultation they conducted, including quantitative results from online surveys. We believe this data reinforces public accountability and should be encouraged as part of the next round of briefings. Public consultation is a statutory requirement of the Act and we encourage departments to comply with it.

Richness of evidence should be encouraged

Some select committees, such as the Environment Committee, considered that the briefing they reviewed did not contribute to an increased understanding of the issues under discussion, and mostly “stated the obvious”. We were also disappointed that some briefings focused on current issues rather than trying to detect emerging issues.

We found that some briefings used evidence that had been previously collected by a department for prior research. We acknowledge that long-term insights briefings are a new requirement for departments—one that does not come with additional funding. However, we consider that long-term insights briefing are a three-yearly opportunity for the public service to conduct novel, forward-thinking research, and are therefore worth putting effort into.

Timing of long-term insights briefings

The Standing Orders Committee of the 52nd Parliament recommended that the Government coordinate long-term insights briefings so that they are presented to the House no later than 30 June in the second calendar year after a general election. This tends to be roughly the mid-point of the parliamentary term. This timing would ensure that consideration by select committees did not occur during pre- and post- election months, and that committees had enough time to hold hearings and initiate inquiries, if they wished to. This timing would also allow committees to examine and report on the briefings outside the main peak of their financial scrutiny work. According to this guidance, long-term insights briefings should have been presented by June 2022.

⁶ “A chief executive must undertake public consultation on: (a) the subject matter to be included in a long-term insights briefing; and (b) a draft of the briefing.” Public Service Act 2020, Schedule 6, clause 9 (1).

Given that the Public Service Act came into force in August 2020, departments had until August 2023 to produce their first briefing. As noted in our first interim report in May 2022, we had hoped that most briefings would be completed well before then.

We found that several departments had to delay their briefing completion dates. Of the 19 briefings, only a few were completed by the recommended deadline of June 2022. Nine were not completed until 2023, and two were not published until July and August 2023, leaving little time for consideration during the 53rd Parliament.

We acknowledge the unusual context in which this first cycle of long-term insights briefings has taken place. The continual revision of completion dates can be attributed to the consequences of COVID-19 and major structural reform work, the availability of stakeholders to engage with the briefing, and the time needed to process the feedback received from public consultation.

Communicating progress to Parliament more often

We suggest that departments should be encouraged to communicate their progress on long-term insights briefings more often to Parliament. Select committees have 90 working days to report to the House on a long-term insights briefing. If they were aware of the progress made by departments and knew the briefings' expected completion dates, it would help committees to plan their work accordingly and enable them to conduct better scrutiny.

Preparing for the second round of long-term insights briefings

The second round of long-term insights briefings has commenced from 7 August 2023. We encourage the Government to promote a coordinated approach to the briefings. We believe a common framework would help to identify priority areas for the future of New Zealand. We would like to see the briefings strive to build an overarching futures narrative for the country; this would require a whole-of-government approach to long-term insights briefings.

We support the use of standard evaluative questions to investigate the content, the process, and the response related to long-term insights briefings.⁷ This would help to ensure that long-term insights briefings are assessed against the requirements of the Public Service Act.

DPMC system-wide review

During this first round of long-term insights briefings, we asked the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) to give us regular updates on the progress of briefings across departments.

We learned that DPMC has commenced a system-wide review of the first round of long-term insights briefings. It will include looking at the approaches taken by departments to decide on topics, patterns of lengths, methods, and tools, and the initial effects on public service stewardship and policy advice. Departments are also expected to conduct self-assessments which will feed into the system-wide review. DPMC is due to publish its review at the end of August 2023, which will help to inform its guidance for the second round.

⁷ Boston, J (2022) "Editorial note", Policy Quarterly, 18 (1), p 2.

We thank DPMC for the insights it has provided us over the course of this first round and we encourage the Governance and Administration Committee of the 54th Parliament to continue this fruitful collaboration.

Recommendations of the Auditor-General

The Auditor-General recommended that some departments improve the incorporation of public feedback into the preparation of their long-term insights briefings. He also recommended that they consider a wider range of scenarios to provide more realistic and relevant policy analysis, and that they broaden the measurement and scope of some variables of interest.

The Auditor-General has suggested a set of standard questions to assist select committees' scrutiny of long-term insights briefings. They cover the selection of the subject by departments, the preparation and public engagement process, and lessons learned for the next round of briefings. We welcome the Auditor-General's suggestions and we hope that the committees of the 54th Parliament will make use of them.

Encouraging cross-agency consideration of upcoming challenges

We encourage departments to share their progress across the public service and to identify areas where common challenges could be investigated jointly. We believe that fewer, more in-depth long-term insights briefings carried out jointly by two or more departments would support the futures-thinking role of the public service more effectively. We hope that the next round of long-term insights briefings will be less fragmented across government departments.

We encourage the Governance and Administration Committee of the 54th Parliament to continue its stewardship role in the parliamentary scrutiny of long-term insights briefings.

Appendix

Committee procedure

We met between 7 July 2021 and 23 August 2023 to consider this briefing. We received written evidence from the Public Service Commission and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and heard oral evidence from Jonathan Boston, Andrew Jackson, and Malcolm Menzies.

Committee members

Ian McKelvie (Chairperson)
Hon David Bennett
Rachel Boyack
Naisi Chen
Jamie Strange

Evidence received

The documents we received as evidence for this briefing are available on the Parliament website, www.parliament.nz.

A recording of our hearing is available [here](#) (from 29:00).