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Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Justice Committee
Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Ture

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2024/25 Annual review of the Department of Corrections

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Hon Andrew Bayly, Chairperson

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Department of Corrections

Recommendation

The Justice Committee has conducted the annual review of the Department of Corrections for 2024/25, and recommends that the House take note of its report.

About the Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa

The Department of Corrections is responsible for improving public safety and operates under the Corrections Act 2004. Corrections' responsibilities under the Act include:

- operating corrections facilities in accordance with the Act's rules and regulations
- ensuring that sentences are administered safely, securely, and humanely
- assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community
- providing information to the courts and the New Zealand Parole Board.

The Department of Corrections manages over 10,700 people in prison and about 24,000 people serving a sentence or order in the community. It employs approximately 11,000 staff across multiple sites, including prisons and in the community.

We discussed Corrections' performance in 2024/25 with the chief executive, Jeremy Lightfoot, and members of his team.

Summary of 2024/25 performance and audit results

The following table summarises the department's financial performance over recent years.

Financial trends

	2021/22 \$million	2022/23 \$million	2023/24 \$million	2024/25 \$million	Change in 2024/25
Revenue	1,916	2,055	2,248	2,399	6.7%
Expenditure	1,866	2,038	2,220	2,365	6.5%
Net surplus	50	17	28	34	—

Corrections' revenue and expenditure increased by 6.7 percent and 6.5 percent respectively in 2024/25. The increased revenue was mostly due to an additional \$150 million in Budget 2025 to address the costs of a large increase in the prisoner population (1,200 more prisoners since 30 June 2024). A substantial portion of the funding has been allocated to increase the number of frontline corrections officers.

Audit results

The auditor issued a standard audit report, indicating that the information audited fairly reflected the department's activities and financial position. He rated the commission's management control environment, and the financial information and supporting systems and controls, as "very good". The auditor rated the performance information and supporting systems and controls as "good". He noted that the performance framework remains unchanged and recommends again that Corrections develop an integrated performance framework to strengthen the connection between strategic outcomes under the Hōkai Rangi strategy and operational performance. Corrections should also ensure that its performance measures are clearly defined, with systems and processes for reporting them.

The auditor commented that he had assessed Corrections' complex accounting treatment of the Waikeria Prison project after its completion. He was satisfied that the Waikeria Prison's assets and the public-private partnership liabilities were appropriately accounted for. He also concluded that Corrections' downward revaluation of the building assets as of 30 June 2025 was appropriate.

Non-financial performance

Corrections achieved 62 percent (21 of 34) of its non-financial performance measures. Two unmet measures were the percentage of offenders and victims who were notified of an impending Parole Board hearing or outcome decision, as required by the New Zealand Parole Board. Against a target of 98 percent, only 81 percent of offenders were notified, and 87 percent of victims. Other measures not achieved include:

- no unnatural deaths (there were 10 compared to 13 in 2023/24)
- the percentage of offenders entitled to receive an offender plan within a standardised timeframe (this was 75 percent, compared with 77 percent the previous year)
- the percentage of prison assets in poor or very poor condition (this was 6 percent higher than the target).

Refresh of the Hōkai Rangi strategy

In December 2024, Corrections released a refreshed version of its organisational strategy, Hōkai Rangi, which was first adopted in 2019. The refreshed version continues to focus on its three interconnected organisational outcomes: improved public safety, reduced reoffending, and reduced Māori overrepresentation. It includes an organisational roadmap that specifies its focus areas and initiatives.

Corrections said that two important parts of the refreshed strategy are the performance framework and the organisational roadmap. We note the inclusion of "impacts" in the performance framework is an attempt to better identify ways to assess its performance against intended outcomes. We heard that the five focus areas of the organisational roadmap will help to identify, prioritise, and monitor initiatives that will contribute to achieving its organisational outcomes, and will be used to inform annual planning.

We note that the framework's outcome measures have not been updated or expanded to reflect the new strategic direction. Corrections said the strategy outlines how the department uses its funding to achieve its intended outcomes, but this is difficult to measure because of

the overlap of funding across all three intended outcomes. The department said it allocates funding specifically for Māori providers or investing in cultural capability. But it emphasised that all of its funding should be working on better outcomes for Māori. It said this objective cannot be achieved without also funding programmes to improve public safety and reduce reoffending.

The department said it is doing several pieces of work that could help it understand how to better measure its performance against intended outcomes. It indicated that this work might change some of the performance measures that it reports on. We expect to see changes to its performance measures the next time we hear from it.

Responding to the rising prisoner population

Each year, the Ministry of Justice publishes a report on long-term trends in the justice sector.¹ In its 2025 Justice Sector Projections report, the ministry projected that there would be a 39 percent increase in people remanded in custody, from 4,693 in February 2025 to 6,525 by June 2035. The number of sentenced prisoners would increase by 33 percent from 5,795 to 7,705 over the same period. This will lead to a situation where many facilities are operating near or at capacity.

Corrections said it is working to increase capacity to meet the rising prisoner population and respond to the evolving needs of prisoners. Recent milestones include opening the new site at Waikeria Prison that added 500 high-security beds and 96 beds for prisoners with mental health and addiction needs.

Long-Term Network Configuration Plan

The Long-Term Network Configuration Plan is Corrections' first comprehensive, 20-year strategic plan for prison infrastructure. It aims to address capacity, quality, and resilience across the network. We note that the plan identifies an insufficient number and quality of high-security beds, and that the majority of huts in low-security sites are degrading and not fit for purpose. The department told us it had identified locations within its existing network of 18 prisons (15 men's and 3 women's) that could be suitable for expanding capacity.

We heard that the expansion of Christchurch Men's Prison has four phases that would expand high security and mental health capacity. The first two phases are in the procurement stage. Only the first phase has been funded. It would provide an initial 250 additional beds, and would include building ancillary and amenity infrastructure for the entire project, such as a gatehouse, a secure perimeter, and staff amenities. The last phases of the expansion would then focus on additional residential accommodation for the prisoners. We heard that this would be similar to the phased approach taken with Waikeria Prison, where phase one comprised 596 beds, followed by another 810 beds in a later expansion.

The department said construction has started on a high security unit at Hawke's Bay Regional Prison, that will add another 316 places. It is expected to be operational in early 2027 to meet the projected population pressures based on the justice sector report. Auckland Prison is currently being considered as a site that could be expanded using the fast-track consenting process, but there are no immediate plans to increase capacity at that

¹ Ministry of Justice, Justice Sector Projections, 2025–2035.

location. Corrections suggested that if the prisoner population was not growing at its current rate, it could consider retiring some of its older assets as new capacity is built.

Use of double-bunking

We asked whether Corrections has considered reducing the number of double-bunked cells in its network. It said it needs to balance its responsibility to safely accommodate prisoners with continuing to receive people into its custody: “we don’t have a choice of saying we’re full”. Where possible, however, the second bunk is kept in reserve for use in the event of a natural disaster if prisoners need to be relocated. Corrections added that it tries to keep prisoners as close to home as possible to maintain family connections, so use of double-bunking ebbs and flows depending on geographic demand.

We note that 84 percent of prisoners were double-bunked at Northland Region Corrections Facility, while 3 percent were double-bunked at Waikeria Prison.² The department said the variation across its network is because its prisons have different purposes. Maximum security units are not double-bunked, but some low security units are configured to accommodate two prisoners. It said prisoners at Northland Region Corrections Facility spend most of the day outside their cell and predominantly use the cell at night.

Rehabilitation and reintegration

In Budget 2024 the Government committed to extending rehabilitation services to remand prisoners, with funding made available from 1 July 2025. Since then, the department said, it has expanded its services for people held on remand, particularly remand convicted prisoners, and is working to improve the effectiveness of rehabilitation.

Corrections told us this is complex work, given the increase in remand prisoners and their unique needs. It said there is a limit to what it can achieve for remand convicted prisoners awaiting a sentence of two years or less, as they may be released from prison immediately upon sentencing. This rapid “flow out” makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive rehabilitation programme to respond to their criminal offending or physical and mental health needs. The department is more confident that it can offer meaningful help for those facing longer sentences, as there is more stability to provide sequenced services.

Responding to mental health needs

The department told us that through its *Optimising our Services* programme, it could identify what services were most effective for rehabilitation, which led to some programmes being discontinued, reduced, or increased. We heard that this has not reduced the completion rates for those programmes. Compared to the previous financial year, more people had accessed health and rehabilitation programmes in 2024/25. Corrections said it had found a disconnect between its internal and externally contracted services, with the same type of services running concurrently. It decided to bring most of its mental health services in house to make services more efficient and effective.

We asked how the 96-bed mental health unit at Waikeria Prison operates. Corrections told us it works with the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand to provide off-site mental

² https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/statistics/double_bunking_in_prisons.

health support for prisoners with acute mental health needs. Before doing so, it tries to manage a person's mental health needs internally to reduce the risks involved with moving someone outside a secure perimeter. We heard that the Waikeria facility includes:

- a subunit for the high-intensity alcohol and drug programme for high-security prisoners
- an intensive support subunit for acutely unwell prisoners
- a subunit that supports prisoners who are transitioning back into the mainstream prison.

Women's rehabilitation programmes

We note that the women's prison population has increased from 633 in June 2024 to 817 in 2025. We asked what investment Corrections has made into rehabilitation and reintegration to address the rising prison population. Corrections said that providing rehabilitation programmes to women has become a focus area as part of its *Optimising our Services*. It is now able to provide remand convicted women with rehabilitation programmes, such as Te Ira Oranga and Te Ira Wāhine at Auckland Women's Prison. It said it will measure the effectiveness of the programmes through the rehabilitation quotient. The quotient compares outcomes for those who completed a programme and those who did not.

Reintegration service providers

Corrections is reviewing its reintegration service providers to understand how it can better meet the needs of a person reintegrating into the community. It is looking at the relationship between its case management service and its probation service so it can effectively support someone who leaves prison. Corrections said that after its organisational change, *Te Ara Whakamua*, it established the role of regional integration manager. The role aims to have greater oversight of reintegration providers and understand the needs of a locality. We heard that a national provider would be practical in some instances, but a more bespoke and nuanced approach with local providers is better in other instances.

Māori overrepresentation in the prison population

At the end of June 2025, Māori represented 52.5 percent of the prison population. Corrections acknowledges that "[f]or almost four decades, Māori have been persistently overrepresented making up more than half of the prison population". One of the department's organisational outcomes aims to reduce Māori overrepresentation by making sure that the corrections system works for Māori. It does this by working collaboratively with Māori to provide programmes and services for Māori. We heard that the programmes and services try to connect Māori with their history and whakapapa, to make sure that "they recognise culture as part of who they are".

We asked whether the high number of Māori in prison is attributable to an increase in new offenders, or to reoffending by former prisoners. Corrections said it is the latter, with core attributes such as associating with gangs contributing to reoffending after release. It told us that for those with longstanding gang affiliations, it needs to find other ways to provide rehabilitation that will be more effective. It observed, however, that the gang-related recidivists are starting to "age out". Young Māori are not entering the corrections system at the same rate as 20 years ago, and those who do enter the system have less gang affiliation.

Māori leadership board

Corrections told us that the Māori Leadership Board no longer exists because it was not contributing substantially to improving Corrections' performance. This was due to poor attendance, and it was not able to provide any significant new insights into how the department could improve outcomes for Māori.

We heard that, instead of a national board, the department chose to strengthen its relationship with 11 regions across the country. In each region, a general manager for Communities, Pathways and Partnerships is responsible for building local relationships. They work with a lead adviser for Māori partnerships, prison managers, and a general manager for Pae Ora services to identify work that would lift the performance of the corrections system and reduce reoffending.

Other matters considered

We also discussed the following matters. For more detail, refer to the pages noted below in the [*Hansard* transcript of our hearing](#), available on the Parliament website.

- **Basic “citizenship admin” when someone leaves prison**—We discussed how effective Corrections is at ensuring people have at least an ID, initial accommodation, and a benefit lined up, so they can move ahead after prison. (*Transcript, p 11.*)
- **Prisoner-on-prisoner and prisoner-on-staff assaults**—Corrections told us the recorded number of assaults has increased because of better reporting mechanisms. However, serious assaults have substantially decreased. (*Transcript, p 19.*)
- **Turnover and recruitment of psychologists**—The department said its highest staff turnover is in psychologists because they are in such high demand that they can often find opportunities elsewhere. However, it has filled 17 more psychologist roles in the year under review and has made a net gain compared to the previous financial year. (*Transcript, p 24.*)
- **Recruitment campaign**—We heard that Corrections' recruitment campaign continues to be successful, with 150,000 applications since it started in February 2024, and 70 new corrections officers starting each month. It has reduced its recruitment from overseas, instead focusing on increasing domestic recruitment. (*Transcript, p 32.*)

Appendix

Committee procedure

We conducted a standard annual review of the Department of Corrections for the 2024/25 financial year. On 1 December 2025 we heard evidence from the department for 2 hours and received advice from the Office of the Auditor-General. We sent written questions to the department for response. We met again on 12 March 2026 to finalise this report.

Committee members

Hon Andrew Bayly (Chairperson)
Hon Ginny Andersen
Jamie Arbuckle
Carl Bates
Tākuta Ferris
Rima Nakhle
Tom Rutherford
Todd Stephenson
Vanushi Walters
Hon Dr Duncan Webb
Dr Lawrence Xu-Nan

Dr Tracey McLellan, Tamatha Paul, and Rawiri Waititi participated in our annual review hearing.

Related resources

The following material is available on the Parliament website:

- [the Department of Corrections annual report](#)
- [the briefing paper we received from the Office of the Auditor-General](#)
- [responses from the Department of Corrections to our written questions](#)
- [the structured agenda for our hearing with the Department of Corrections](#)
- [the Hansard transcript of our hearing](#)
- [a recording of our hearing](#).