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Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Social Services and Community Committee

Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Ratonga Pāpori, Take Hapori

54th Parliament

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**Report of the Controller and Auditor-General,
*Oranga Tamariki: Inquiry into procurement
and contract management***

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Joseph Mooney, Chairperson

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Report of the Controller and Auditor-General, *Oranga Tamariki: Inquiry into procurement and contract management*

Recommendation

The Social Services and Community Committee has considered the report of the Controller and Auditor-General, *Oranga Tamariki: Inquiry into procurement and contract management*, and recommends that the House take note of its report.

About the Controller and Auditor-General's report

Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children is responsible for the wellbeing of children in New Zealand who are at risk of harm, have offended, or are likely to offend. To support this work, it contracts with social service providers across the country to deliver services to children and families in need. These contracts are worth about half a billion dollars every year.

In July 2024, concerns were raised with the Office of the Auditor-General about Oranga Tamariki's contract management, and in particular its contracting decisions for 2024/25. In May 2025, the Auditor-General published the report *Oranga Tamariki: Inquiry into procurement and contract management*. The report examined the processes and decisions that Oranga Tamariki made during its contract procurement round for 2024/25.

We met with the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) and Oranga Tamariki to discuss the report and how Oranga Tamariki is responding to its findings. We also met with the Independent Children's Monitor | Aroturuki Tamariki and the Children's Commissioner | Mana Mokopuna in a joint hearing, to hear their perspective as agencies within the child wellbeing system. This report forms a summary of those discussions.

Oranga Tamariki's contract procurement for 2024/25

In 2023/24, Oranga Tamariki contracted about 550 providers for a broad range of services. About one-third of these contracts were set to expire on 30 June 2024. Before the 2024/25 contract procurement round began, Oranga Tamariki was aware of issues with its procurement and contract management practices, and had identified financial pressures in its budget for contracted services. It had begun work to address these issues but had not implemented changes.

In November 2023, Oranga Tamariki was directed to refocus its spending on its core functions and activities, and to reduce its overall budget by 6.5 percent. To address these directives, Oranga Tamariki undertook an organisational restructuring and made changes to aspects of its contracting.

In February 2024, Oranga Tamariki changed its practices to fully recover any funding providers had not spent on services. Previously, it had allowed providers to retain funding even if they had not achieved all of their contracted measures. The previous approach had

meant that, in some instances, providers could move funding from under-utilised services to over-utilised services to meet demand. The Auditor-General found that Oranga Tamariki did not provide adequate warning for this change, and the reconciliation process did not run smoothly. This process occurred at the same time as the 2024/25 contracting round, and pulled focus away from decisions about what services Oranga Tamariki wanted to contract in the future.

Oranga Tamariki also decided to reduce its contracted services budget for 2024/25 by about \$60 million. To achieve this, it sought to review its entire contracted services budget, including both contracts that were expiring on 30 June 2024 and multi-year contracts that were not due to expire. Oranga Tamariki sought input from regional staff, but ultimately top-down decisions were made by senior staff in the national office. The Auditor-General concluded that Oranga Tamariki made decisions late in the process, did not adequately document them, and did not give providers enough advance notice of those decisions.

The Auditor-General's findings and recommendations

The Auditor-General prefaced his findings by acknowledging that Oranga Tamariki was faced with a challenging situation, and needed to make difficult trade-offs in the contracting round. It recognised that Oranga Tamariki was entitled to make decisions about contracts, and to reduce or stop funding.

However, the Auditor-General found several concerning issues during the contracting round. They included that:

- Oranga Tamariki did not have good foundations of robust procurement and contract management systems in place, and was poorly prepared to carry out the contracting round
- decisions were made late in the process and decision-making criteria were inconsistent and poorly documented
- there was a lack of evidence used by Oranga Tamariki to inform its decisions, including how the decisions would affect children, their families, and service providers
- performance measures were not linked to outcomes that Oranga Tamariki was trying to achieve
- there were sudden changes in practice, a unilateral approach was taken to contract variations, and there was poor communication of these changes
- payments to providers and social sector pay equity funding were not delivered
- Oranga Tamariki failed to adequately plan for the transition of services
- processes were lacking to identify or manage conflicts of interest during the contracting round
- there was a failure, at an organisational level, to consistently demonstrate a culture of integrity, transparency, and accountability.

The OAG told us that, in its view, the issues in the contracting round “significantly harmed trust and confidence” in Oranga Tamariki and its contracting work. It said that Oranga Tamariki needs to make “urgent improvements” to address these issues. In the report, the Auditor-General recommended that Oranga Tamariki:

- prepare and implement a clear strategy for procuring services from, and managing contracts with, social service providers
- engage with the social services sector to prepare and implement a standard process for contracting rounds, including consistent time frames for when it will make decisions about Outcome Agreements and notify providers
- ensure that, in future contracting rounds:
 - recommendations are informed by a detailed analysis of the likely effect on children, young people, and the sustainability of the social services sector
 - it records this analysis clearly in relevant decision-making documents
- urgently improve its contract management practice, including by:
 - linking performance measures to outcomes
 - taking a consistent, predictable approach to performance monitoring and reconciliation
 - routinely paying on time for services that have been provided
 - anticipating and planning for the end of contracts to ensure a smooth transition
 - communicating with providers in an open and transparent manner
 - taking commitments it has made to Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners into account in managing contracts.

The Auditor-General also noted his office's intention to monitor these issues closely, and follow up with Oranga Tamariki as it responds to the report's recommendations. In our hearing, the OAG noted that Oranga Tamariki has already made some structural changes to try to improve its procurement and contracting processes.

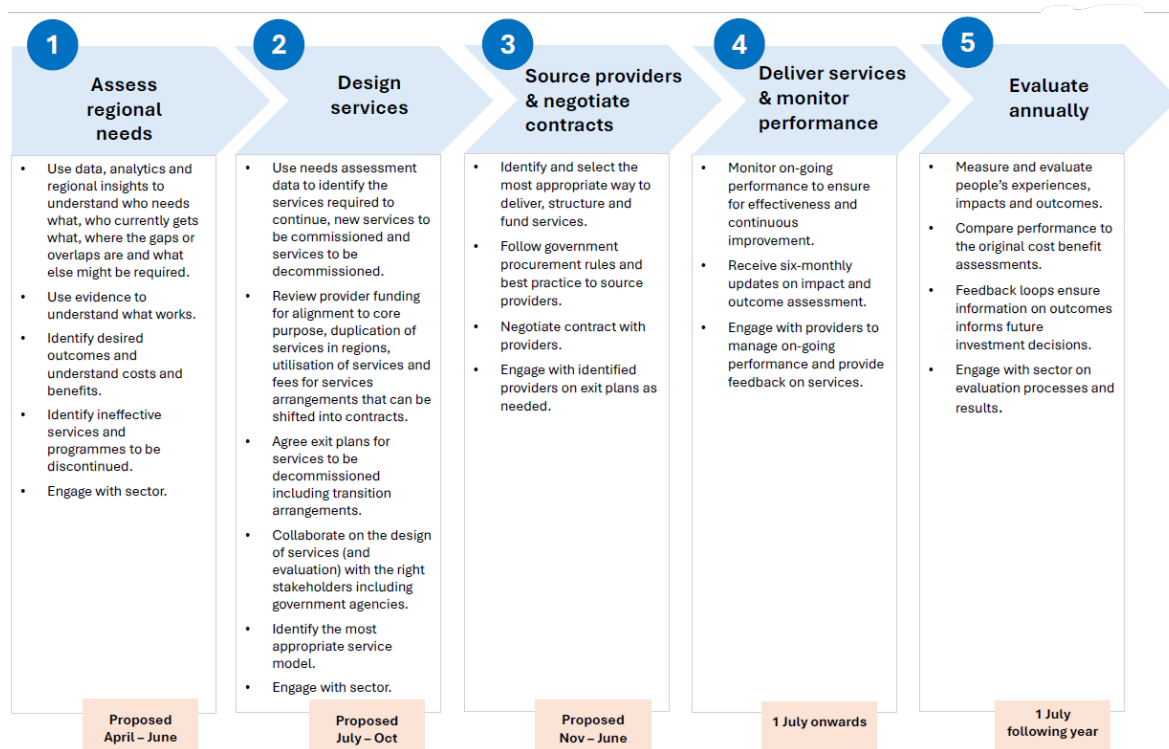
Oranga Tamariki's response to the report

In our hearing with Oranga Tamariki, we heard about how it is responding to the findings of the report, including its plan to improve its commissioning process. Its plan involves four broad programmes of work:

- examining 2024/25 contracting activities, determining which contracts and contract variations were in place, and extending any contracts or services ending 30 June 2025 to 31 December 2025
- refreshing the Oranga Tamariki commissioning approach, including by ensuring that commissioning meets regional needs, making strategic procurement decisions, and creating good internal governance arrangements
- refining and simplifying its internal processes for commissioning services
- rejuvenating its communications and engagement approach, through regular provider pānui (public notices), regional engagement, and by using trusted channels instead of setting up new ones.

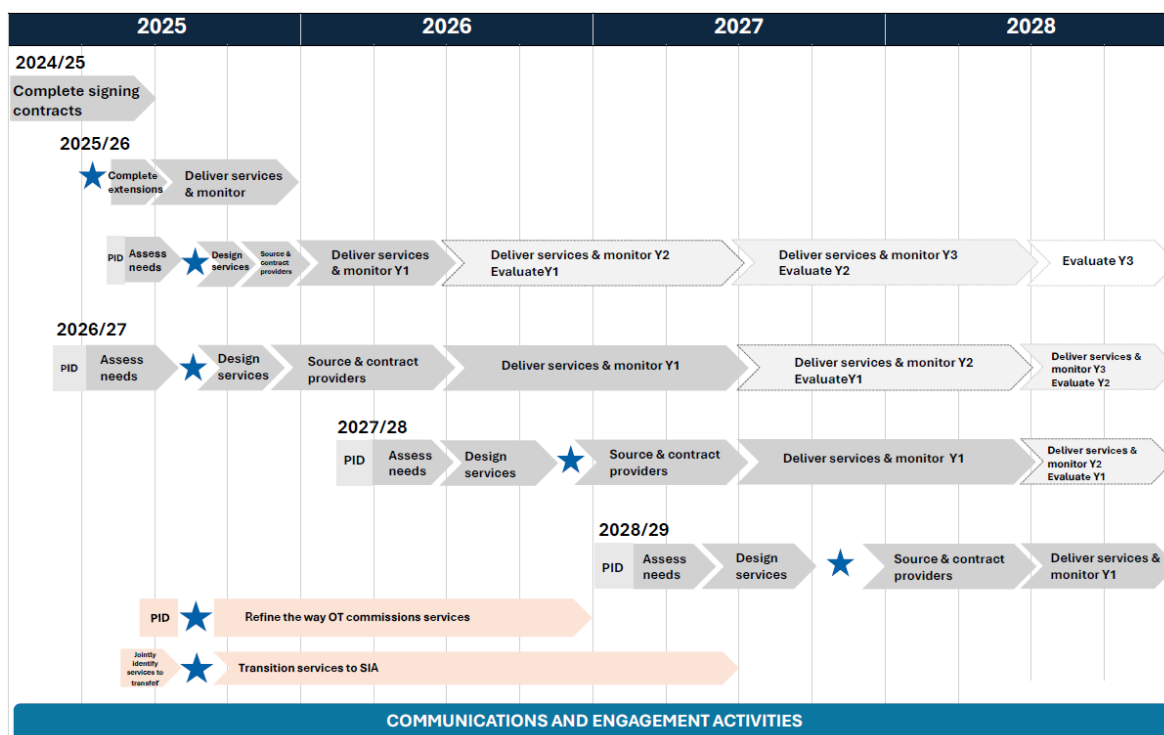
Oranga Tamariki gave us some diagrams (see below) to visualise the proposed new commissioning approach, and a timeline of how these different streams of work will mesh for contracting rounds over time. It said that, if the new commissioning approach is working optimally, work would be happening on two years simultaneously. For the calendar year 2025, three years are operating simultaneously while Oranga Tamariki continues work on the 2024/25 year while transitioning into the new approach. We encourage Oranga Tamariki

to engage independent peer-review of its new commissioning approach, such as from the Office of the Auditor-General or other suitably qualified agencies.



Above: Oranga Tamariki's proposed five step process for commissioning services

Below: Oranga Tamariki's four-year horizon of key activities



- ★ Cabinet/ministerial process
- PID Programme initiation documentation

Strengthening communications and regional partnerships

Oranga Tamariki agreed that its communication and engagement with providers was inconsistent and “in some instances, inadequate”. We heard that it wrote to all of the affected providers to acknowledge this. Oranga Tamariki emphasised that it is in the process of resetting, and that rebuilding trust will take some time. Part of this will be strengthening its communication practices.

It said that many providers already have strong relationships with Oranga Tamariki’s regional staff, and reinforcing this relationship “is still really key”. To do this, Oranga Tamariki is making sure that its regional staff have all the information they need to provide answers directly to providers. We asked whether Oranga Tamariki is considering making regional advice publicly available, to aid transparency. It said it has no issue with this.

Oranga Tamariki emphasised the importance of working with providers to make sure it is asking the right questions, and getting the right data and information. This would allow it to create a better picture of what needs look like across the country, and which regions may need more or less help. It said that one of its goals is to build a dashboard for reporting by region, service, and programme.

Oranga Tamariki’s media release

In response to concerns raised by providers during the 2024/25 contracting round, Oranga Tamariki issued a media release. It provided data on the number of affected providers and contracts, and emphasised that it was focussed on funding services that had performed well. It also stated that:

Some providers have been able to accumulate significant surpluses and this is unacceptable. Every cent of funding we give providers needs to be reaching the children and young people for which it is intended, not sitting idle in the individual bank accounts of providers.

The Auditor-General’s report found that this media release significantly harmed trust and confidence in Oranga Tamariki. Given that Oranga Tamariki accepted the findings of the Auditor-General’s report, we asked if it still stood by its statement, and whether it had considered issuing a clarification or retraction of its release in light of the report’s findings.

Oranga Tamariki told us that the first part of this selected quote was “quite legitimate”, as it is providing people money to deliver a service. Its role is to make sure that this money does not sit idle, and that it is being used to deliver on services. It also told us that it has more work to do when looking at a provider’s balance sheet to assess the exact nature of any underspending. If services do not require the full funding provided, Oranga Tamariki is interested in looking at where else in that region funding could be reallocated. Oranga Tamariki did acknowledge that it did not take the steps necessary to engage with providers to understand the issues contributing to these surpluses.

Contracting models

Oranga Tamariki noted that it, alongside all social sector agencies, uses the contract model provided by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Each agency modifies this model for their own purposes. Oranga Tamariki told us it aims to create a more joined-

up approach to ensure that reporting on outcomes is more consistent, so that reporting across all social sector agencies can be more efficient.

We discussed overseas models that Oranga Tamariki could look to. It told us that one aspect from overseas it is considering is the length of contracts. Generally, it procures contracts with a length of two to three years. Instead, it is considering a longer period for some services. It is also considering matching up outcomes over the longer term with contracts in the short term. “We need to make sure that we are developing contracts that are based on outcomes, and that we have performance measures in place that demonstrate in year one to five how they are contributing to this outcome that has a twenty-year outlook.”

Financial constraints

Given the number of children in its care, and the reduction in its overall budget from November 2023, we asked whether Oranga Tamariki will still be able to match funding to the needs of the children it oversees. We heard that Oranga Tamariki is “absolutely going to be actively trying to capture the need” despite whatever funding levels may be. It said that its focus is on the tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau that come to its attention.

Measuring outcomes

We asked how Oranga Tamariki measures what good looks like, and how outcomes are measured in the context of the 60,000 children across the country that have come to its attention. Oranga Tamariki said that, at a broad level, it uses Statistics New Zealand’s Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) wellbeing indicators.¹ These include measures such as life satisfaction, finances, health, and housing. Oranga Tamariki told us it is interested in how it can use the data it receives from advisers to contribute to the IDI material.

Oranga Tamariki also said that, ultimately, “Oranga Tamariki should never ever be the end goal. We want to have a system where they do not come into our care. That’s the big goal.” It wants all families to be supported to look after their own children. When children do end up in its care, Oranga Tamariki wants to get them back with their family as soon as possible, and for children to be minimally dependent on support as they reach adulthood.

Interaction with the Social Investment Agency

The Social Investment Agency was set up as a central agency to lead, develop, and demonstrate a social investment approach in action. We heard that as part of work to refresh the commissioning approach, the Minister for Children will collaborate with the agency to report to Cabinet on any programmes or services that may transition to the agency. Oranga Tamariki said it could not provide any more specific details about what these could be, as this work is still in progress.

We raised concerns that, if funding and contracting for services is shifted over to the Social Investment Agency, underlying issues raised in the Auditor-General’s report may not be addressed by that agency. Oranga Tamariki told us that it would be “very, very safe to say”

¹ For more information about the Integrated Data Infrastructure, see: [Integrated Data Infrastructure | Statistics New Zealand—Tatauranga Aotearoa](#).

that the issues raised in the Auditor-General's report would "undoubtedly" be part of any agency providing these services.

Oranga Tamariki also noted that certain things it invests in are about ensuring it meets its statutory obligations. These services could not be transferred to another agency very easily, and some would be services that only Oranga Tamariki can undertake.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnerships

One of the Auditor-General's findings was that it did not see Oranga Tamariki factor its relationships under Te Tiriti o Waitangi into its decision-making or into the way it engaged with kaupapa Māori, iwi, and hapū providers. We asked how Oranga Tamariki was responding to this finding.

Oranga Tamariki told us that when it developed its proposed new commissioning approach, its strategic iwi partners were the first groups it consulted with. It is also conducting work around devolution and decentralisation of services, putting more onus on providers to take responsibility of services in their own communities. Part of this work, to date, has involved working directly with iwi to develop a new way of working, operating, and devolving particular services. Oranga Tamariki referred to concerns it has heard about devolving these services being risky, but explained that "no, it's probably less risky because they're in the community, they know the families".

Given the reduction in Oranga Tamariki's budget, we asked how it is making sure that the Tiriti partners to whom services have been devolved have what they need to be successful. Oranga Tamariki said that part of the process it is currently working through is about building capability. As an example, it noted that there are not enough social workers in New Zealand, so it could look to transfer social workers or partners around to meet the highest needs.

Comments from the Independent Children's Monitor and the Children's Commissioner

The Independent Children's Monitor was originally established to monitor agencies' compliance with the National Care Standards Regulations. Its role has since been expanded to monitor the whole of the oranga tamariki system.² The Children's Commissioner is an independent advocate for all children under 18 in New Zealand, and for all care-experienced young people aged up to 25. The two agencies work closely together, alongside other oversight system partners such as the Ombudsman, to oversee the children's system in New Zealand.

Children are at the centre of the issues raised by the Auditor-General in relation to Oranga Tamariki's contracting. As these agencies oversee the system, we were interested to hear the perspectives of the Commissioner and the Monitor on Oranga Tamariki's practices, and child wellbeing in New Zealand.

² The oranga tamariki system (using lower case letters) refers to the care and protection system for children and young people. The system includes the specific Oranga Tamariki agency, but also services provided by a range of government agencies such as Police, Health, Education, and Social Development. It also includes services contracted by Oranga Tamariki to non-government agencies.

Both agencies raised concerns about Oranga Tamariki's processes with the ministry in 2024, and the effect that access to contracted services has on the lives of children, young people, and their families. The Monitor said that the Auditor-General's report reflected the concerns raised, and both agencies were pleased to see the outcome of the report. Both agencies also told us that Oranga Tamariki has some work ahead of it to rebuild trust, with the Monitor noting that "trust comes down in the elevator, but it goes up a staircase. And so I think Oranga Tamariki have started walking up those stairs, but there is still a way to go and they must demonstrate their words with actions now."

Oranga Tamariki's role

We noted comments from Oranga Tamariki that it is only responsible for children that are already in care or that have been identified as likely to end up in care. We also noted that some of the services that are no longer contracted by Oranga Tamariki, due to its decrease in funding, used to conduct preventative work to reduce the number of children becoming at risk. Given all of this, we asked whether Oranga Tamariki has a wide enough mandate, or whether it is narrowing itself because it is overwhelmed by the level of need. We also asked whether there is enough ownership within the Oranga Tamariki system about who is responsible for the safety of children.

The Monitor said that, at the time of the contracting round, there were mixed messages on what Oranga Tamariki's focus was; and whether it was focusing on its statutory responsibilities at the expense of early intervention prevention work. Oranga Tamariki provided assurances that this was not the case, and said these programmes were continuing to be funded. It also said that there should be a wider conversation about what Oranga Tamariki's role is and what it should be. It noted that there is a funding challenge across all agencies, and that if Oranga Tamariki chooses not to fund particular services it needs to communicate this so that the sector can determine whether other funding is available to cover the gap.

The Commissioner commented that New Zealand needs to make a collective decision to prioritise children, and put their needs and rights front and centre. It said there needs to be a joined-up approach across the children's system. It believes that if such an approach had been taken during the contracting and procurement process under review, "things would not have landed where they did". An approach like this would increase oversight of the public budget for children's rights, to see exactly what the level of investment is and where it should be targeted. The Commissioner also advocated a cross-party commitment at a parliamentary system level to protecting children in New Zealand.

Measuring outputs and outcomes

The Monitor acknowledged that attributing outputs or outcomes to a service can be a challenge because each child and family will have different circumstances affecting their life. Basing success on output data alone would also not paint an accurate picture. On the other hand, the Monitor said that outcomes can also be hard to measure as they can often be far removed from the service. It emphasised the importance of considering the stories and experiences of people giving and receiving services, and combining this with quantitative data. The Monitor regularly publishes reports on the experiences of care in New

Zealand.³ These reports aim to give an overview of both qualitative and quantitative data, by including stories of children's lived experience.

The Commissioner agreed, stating that to understand what good outcomes look like there needs to be a focus on listening to the needs of children, young people, and whānau. It added that there is insufficient comprehensive and integrated data to understand the prevalence of child maltreatment in New Zealand. We encourage all relevant departments and non-governmental organisations to work together to assess what data is needed, and how they could work together to collect and use it. We also encourage the same to commit to more work on identifying how good outcomes can be qualitatively assessed.

Getting the procurement process right

Problems with Oranga Tamariki's procurement processes predate the 2024/25 contracting round, said the Commissioner. It noted longstanding issues around solid and transparent communication, respect for Tiriti partnerships, and a holistic focus on understanding children's needs from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. It hoped to see action on the recommendations in the Auditor-General's report, to make a positive difference for children in care.

The Monitor noted Oranga Tamariki's comments about understanding regional or community needs. It supports a collaborative approach to procurement processes, where community providers work together to determine the level of services needed. Sometimes providers may have multiple contracts, and use the funding to deliver services that they know are needed, rather than those a central agency in Wellington might think are needed.

Reports of concern

In June 2025, Oranga Tamariki published *Understanding Reports of Concern: Insight into the increase in reports of concern in 2024 and exploring future demand*.⁴ This report was driven by a "notable increase" in reports from the public concerned about children and young people. The report found that in the 2024 calendar year there was a 34.5 percent increase in reports of concern, compared to the previous year. We asked the Monitor and Commissioner what they believe led to this increase.

The Monitor said that the increase was due to several factors, most notably that the Ombudsman had decided to change Oranga Tamariki's practice of treating phone conversations as contact records rather than reports of concern. We heard that this accounted for at least a quarter of the increases. The Monitor added that a reduction in services and support for families, and wider socioeconomic factors including the rising cost of living were also to blame. It also said that many of the reports were renotifications, for children who were already known to Oranga Tamariki. It emphasised the importance of intervention at the earliest opportunity, to prevent children from coming to Oranga Tamariki's attention more than once (if at all). The Commissioner agreed that the explanation is multifaceted, and added that the child protection system had been under pressure for many years before 2024.

³ [Reports | Independent Children's Monitor—Aroturuki Tamariki](#).

⁴ [Understanding the increase in reports of concern | Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children](#).

A reduction in funding for services, alongside an increase in reports of concern, mean that there may be situations in which no services are available for the young person to be referred to. The Monitor told us this leads to situations where a family may be left to support a young person, but if there are no services to keep them occupied they may go on to offend. Once they offend, services are made available. The Monitor emphasised that it should not take someone to offend before the system can respond and provide for their needs: “and this is the challenge if services continue to get cut.”

The Commissioner pointed out that Oranga Tamariki’s report states that it will be “significantly under pressure” to be able to respond to the predicted volume of reports of concern. It referred to this as Oranga Tamariki itself “sounding the alarm” about the pressure on the child protection system. The Commissioner reiterated its belief that the whole children’s system needs to come together and respond to these issues.

***Pūao-te-Āta-tū* and rebuilding trust with Māori providers**

Pūao-te-Āta-tū was a 1988 report published by the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare.⁵ The report discussed many issues that are still present in today’s child wellbeing system, some of which were brought up in the Auditor-General’s report and its findings on Oranga Tamariki’s te Tiriti partnerships. The report made 13 recommendations.

The Commissioner considers *Pūao-te-Āta-tū* to be a “visionary report” that remains a continual touch point for the things that need to change in the child protection system in New Zealand. The Commissioner also said that she hears young people themselves saying that everyone has a role to play in addressing the racism and discrimination that affects their lives.

We asked what concrete steps Oranga Tamariki could take to rebuild trust and capacity with kaupapa Māori providers, and ensure improved outcomes for tamariki Māori. The Monitor said Oranga Tamariki must provide actions to back up its words. It also said that government agencies feel they need to lead, but sometimes it may be best if they follow, listen, and support instead. The Commissioner added that Oranga Tamariki should embrace relational commissioning and contracting approaches with its Māori partners, listen to them about what is actually working, and understand what the aspirations of whānau, hapū, and iwi for their own mokopuna are. The Commissioner also recommended that Oranga Tamariki work closely with its youth advisory group, many of whom are Māori.

Our response to the Auditor-General’s report

We thank the Auditor-General for his office’s important work in analysing exactly what happened during Oranga Tamariki’s contracting round for 2024/25. We appreciate Oranga Tamariki discussing its response with us. We are also grateful to the Independent Children’s Monitor and the Children’s Commissioner for the broad-ranging discussion about children and their wellbeing.

⁵ [Pūao-te-āta-tu \(Daybreak\) | Ministry of Social Development—Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora.](#)

We appreciate Oranga Tamariki's acknowledgement of its shortcomings, and its intentions to refresh and refine the way it contracts services. Given the grave importance of Oranga Tamariki's work, we are encouraged to see that this work is being taken extremely seriously. However, we consider that the events that unfolded should never have happened in the first place. We wish to make sure that Oranga Tamariki's updated processes are successful, work well for providers, and are clearly communicated. We followed up on Oranga Tamariki's progress on these issues during our 2024/25 annual review, and through our continuing work on the child wellbeing system. We also consider that the Social Investment Agency will be important in addressing some of these issues, given its role in monitoring the social investment system involved with procuring social services. We anticipate that we will continue to monitor this with great interest with both Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency.

As a committee, we are interested in the broader structure of the child wellbeing system and how children are cared for in New Zealand. We are grateful to the Auditor-General for bringing our attention to specific topics within this sector. We note that we are also currently considering another report of the Controller and Auditor-General, *Effectiveness of arrangements for reducing child poverty*. We are also considering a report of the Ombudsman, *Children in care: complaints to the Ombudsman 2019–2023, February 2024*. Further, we have initiated a briefing on the child wellbeing system to examine how the wider children's system works together to create the best possible outcomes for children and young people in New Zealand. We will report to the House in due course about our work.

Appendix

Committee procedure

We met between 4 June 2025 and 4 March 2026 to consider the report of the Controller and Auditor-General. We heard oral evidence from the Office of the Auditor-General, Oranga Tamariki, the Children's Commissioner | Mana Mokopuna, and the Independent Children's Monitor | Aroturuki Tamariki.

Committee members

Joseph Mooney (Chairperson)
Jamie Arbuckle (from 13 August 2025)
Kahurangi Carter (from 11 February 2026)
Paulo Garcia (until 11 February 2026)
Hon Willie Jackson (until 18 February 2026)
Takutai Tarsh Kemp (until 26 June 2025)
Dana Kirkpatrick (from 11 February 2026)
Laura McClure
Ricardo Menéndez March (until 11 February 2026)
Maureen Pugh
Hon Jan Tinetti (from 18 February 2026)
Tanya Unkovich (until 27 June 2025)
Helen White
Dr David Wilson (from 16 July 2025 until 13 August 2025)

Related resources

A copy of the report of the Controller and Auditor-General is available on the [Parliament website](#). The slideshow we received from Oranga Tamariki as evidence on this item of business is also available on the [Parliament website](#).

Recordings of our hearings can be accessed online at the following links:

- [Hearing with the Office of the Auditor-General on 4 June 2025.](#)
- [Hearing with Oranga Tamariki on 16 July 2025.](#)
- [Hearing with the Children's Commissioner and the Independent Children's Monitor on 10 September 2025.](#)