



# Summary

## *Public accountability: A matter of trust and confidence*

Public accountability is fundamental to building and maintaining the public's trust and confidence in the public sector. It is about the public sector demonstrating competence, reliability, and honesty in its use of the public's money and resources.

In our increasingly diverse, connected, and informed world, the public is demanding more of our public accountability system. We are interested in the way the public sector approaches its accountability obligations and whether the system can respond to changing public expectations.

Our discussion paper is the first part of a research programme into the future of public accountability in New Zealand. It draws on a range of New Zealand and international literature, observations and comments from academics, public officials who have contributed to public management reforms, and staff at the Office of the Auditor-General.

The primary focus is to explore the accountability relationship between the public sector and the public. Although public officials and their agencies are primarily accountable to their Ministers, and through them to Parliament, they must also act to maintain the trust and confidence of the public they serve.

Our research suggests there is an opportunity to build on the strengths of the current public accountability system in a way that meets New Zealanders' changing needs, today and in the future. To realise this, the system will need to be thought about from the perspective of those who it is ultimately there for, while continuing to recognise the importance of effective parliamentary scrutiny.

We hope our paper will promote an informed discussion about how the public sector approaches its accountability obligations in a rapidly changing world.

