



Summary

Building a stronger public accountability system for New Zealanders

Public accountability is about public organisations demonstrating to Parliament and the public their competence, reliability, and honesty in their use of public money and other public resources.¹

This discussion paper looks at how well New Zealand's public accountability system is working in practice. People who worked in the public sector told us that, although the system had strengths, it was not working as well as it could. In many ways, the public accountability system has become too inwardly focused and disconnected from the public. It is seen by many as compliance-driven and provides little useful information about what is important to Parliament and the public.

There are reforms under way that might change that. These reforms include an increased focus on supporting well-being, new mechanisms that the public sector can use to address complex societal challenges, and new requirements to improve how public organisations work with Māori and to

reinforce the spirit of service to the communities they serve.

In our view, improved public accountability should sit alongside improved performance as a driver for any public sector reform. Without appropriate focus on both, there is a risk that changes might improve the way public services are delivered but still fail to earn the buy-in and trust of New Zealanders.

Long-term stewardship of New Zealanders' well-being needs to be valued as much as short-term management of current issues. Equally, how public organisations behave should be as important as the services they deliver. Public organisations should value their relationships with communities as much as their relationships with Ministers.

The public sector needs to better communicate to Parliament and the public what it does, why it does it, and how it contributes to the outcomes that are important for New Zealand.

