



Submission on draft briefing: The Future of Public Service Integrity

To Te Kawa Mataaho, Public Service Commission

Submitted by Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa (Te Pai Ora SSPA)
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Introduction & Background

1. Te Pai Ora SSPA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft long term insights briefing (LTIB) from Te Kawa Mataaho, Public Service Commission (PSC).
2. We support the LTIB's focus on public service integrity but have identified areas where this could be developed further. We believe that the LTIB could be strengthened by an increased emphasis on how integrity is influenced from within organisations.
3. Our comments are informed by the community sector, including our member organisations. These organisations are not-for-profit, non-Government organisations, working to provide community-based social services. Our submission brings a legislative, policy and practical perspective to this discussion.

About Te Pai Ora SSPA

4. Te Pai Ora SSPA is a membership-based national organisation, comprising over 250 community-based social service organisations from around Aotearoa, based in both rural and urban locations.¹ Our membership makes up a vast majority of the service delivery to children and whānau in community social services across Aotearoa.
5. Our members include local and national social service providers, large national care providers, kaupapa Māori and iwi social service organisations and Pacific providers. Te Pai Ora SSPA members work across the full spectrum of community-based social services with a focus on supporting the positive outcomes of children, rangatahi, families and whānau.
6. Most of our members are primarily funded by Oranga Tamariki, and many have historic and long-term service agreements in that regard. Our members also hold funding contracts with a range of other Government agencies including the Ministries of Social Development, Education and Health, Kāinga Ora and ACC. Given the source of their funding, they have a material interest in a sector that acts in line with professional standards and upholds the public interest.

¹ Find out more about Te Pai Ora SSPA at www.sspa.org.nz. Our strategic plan 2023-2026 can be found [here](#)

7. Te Pai Ora SSPA's vision is that community-based social services across Aotearoa are sustainable, able to make a positive impact every day in our communities, supporting children, rangatahi and whānau to thrive now and into the future. Te Pai Ora SSPA works to strengthen the social sector through advocacy and engagement, learning and development, relationships and sector leadership.
8. Te Pai Ora SSPA is a co-governed organisation, demonstrating our commitment to Te Tiriti in how we operate and work alongside community and Government.

Public service integrity is imperative for Te Pai Ora SSPA and its members

9. For Te Pai Ora SSPA, the renewed focus on public service integrity is timely.
10. In July 2024, we relayed concerns to the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) about the contract management approach taken by Oranga Tamariki. This followed ongoing issues that had been raised by members who reported receiving inadequate support and information about their expiring contracts.
11. The Auditor General decided to inquire into the concerns about procurement and contract management at Oranga Tamariki. He concluded in May 2025 that "Oranga Tamariki did not consistently demonstrate a culture of integrity, transparency, and accountability."²
12. For our members, the integrity of the public service is not an abstract ideal, it has a material impact on whether or not they can deliver vital services to the most vulnerable tamariki and rangatahi across Aotearoa.

Public service integrity is influenced by internal processes, documentation and culture, not just external trends

13. According to the draft LTIB, "Acting with integrity protects against specific risks like corruption but covers a much wider range of positive behaviours than just the absence of corruption." We agree with this statement. The problems identified by the OAG stemmed, not from 'corruption' at Oranga Tamariki but because of poor processes, documentation and culture.
14. However, much of the focus of the draft LTIB is on the role of external factors and international perceptions of corruption. This downplays the specific internal drivers that have led to problems at organisations like Oranga Tamariki and undermined public trust and confidence in these organisations.
15. We believe that the LTIB could benefit from a stronger problem definition. As it stands, performance against international measures of corruption³ is foregrounded ("New Zealand's public service is known for its high integrity"). This gives the impression that the report is more interested in "the absence of corruption" than that wider range of positive behaviours that impact integrity and social cohesion. To the extent that problems are identified with public service integrity in Aotearoa (for example, dropping in international rankings), this is attributed to "external forces".

² The report can be read at <https://oag.parliament.nz/2025/oranga-tamariki>

³ For example, the World Bank's World Governance Indicators for the control of corruption, the European Research Centre for Anti-Corruption and State-Building Public Integrity Index and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.



16. An over-emphasis on external trends and drivers at the expense of organisational culture may downplay the relationship between organisational decision-making and trust and confidence in institutions by citizens. For example, the draft LTIB discusses the global rise of populism and the belief that “democratic institutions are part of ‘the establishment’ run by elites who are not responsive to ‘the people.’” By framing the public service as subject to broader trends like a move towards populism, there is a risk that organisations may see public trust and social cohesion as outside their control.
17. A distrust in institutions is influenced by people’s experiences interacting with those institutions as much as it is abstract international forces. By placing disproportionate emphasis on the latter, organisations may absolve themselves of their responsibility and power to foster that public trust. At Te Pai Ora SSPA, we have seen first-hand how institutions can operate in a way that is not responsive to the communities they exist to serve and how this can influence how their integrity is perceived.
18. One way that the report could improve its problem definition is by further developing the significant way that integrity can differ between organisations. This is notable in the section that talks about the results of the 2025 Te Taunaki – Public Service Census. The figures listed in the LTIB are public service averages, however scores can differ significantly from one organisation to another. Oranga Tamariki, for example, reported less favourable results against all the indicators with 51% of respondents agreeing that the culture of their organisation supports people to act with integrity, compared to 74% across the sector. By not mentioning the breadth of the range, the briefing downplays how these measures are influenced by specific internal factors.

What is needed to strengthen public service integrity in the future?

19. Regardless of the wider operating environment, organisations can take steps to strengthen public service integrity. Te Pai Ora SSPA would like to identify three key factors that we believe should be given more prominence in the LTIB. These are linked to findings from the OAG report:
 - a. Commitment to a partnership with Māori
 - b. Allocation of resources within the sector
 - c. The composition of the public service

Commitment to a partnership with Māori

20. As a co-governed organisation, it is the view of Te Pai Ora SSPA that the most conspicuous omission from the draft LTIB is a full understanding the link between te Tiriti o Waitangi and public service integrity. Although there is a page on te Tiriti in the introduction, this is not mentioned again in the document.
21. We continue to see examples of the public sector operating in a way that is contrary to its obligations under Te Tiriti. In its review of Oranga Tamariki, OAG identified a “failure to account for obligations to te Tiriti partners”, namely kaupapa Māori, iwi and hapū providers. Cases like these contribute significantly to damaged trust and confidence in the organisation.

22. Te Pai Ora SSPA strongly believes that the public service's role in supporting the Crown in fulfilling its obligations as a Treaty partner is more meaningful measure of its integrity than the position of Aotearoa in an international perception ranking. We recommend that this is woven throughout the document instead of relegated to its own section.

Allocation of resources within the sector

23. The draft LTIB mentions the relationship between public service funding and integrity: "Pressures on the public service to cut costs and/or operate more efficiently are known to put strain on integrity." Te Pai Ora SSPA would like to see this given more prominence and framed in a way that acknowledges the role that the Government plays in funding the sector.
24. The OAG report identifies that the problems with the way that Oranga Tamariki managed the 2024/25 contracting round stem from its response to a reduction in baseline funding. According to OAG, one of the main ways that Oranga Tamariki tried to make the savings was through an organisational restructure that reduced the number of contract managers in regional offices. This directly impacted the ability of those offices to fund providers that deliver essential services and undermined long-established relationships between regional offices and communities.
25. Although pressure to cut costs may be driven by external factors, the way that organisations respond to those pressures has a direct impact on their ability to operate with integrity. In the case of Oranga Tamariki, the allocation of costs demonstrated a disconnect from the communities that it exists to serve, undermining public trust in its operations.

The composition of the public service

26. Finally, we believe that the LTIB could include greater emphasis of the fact that public service integrity is strengthened when the workforce reflects the public it serves.
27. According to the Public Service Census, employee demographics broadly mirror the "high levels of cultural diversity" cited in the draft briefing. However, diversity can differ significantly from organisation to organisation. Moreover, there are other factors that can influence whether an organisation employs the right people to serve the public with integrity such as geographic diversity. In the case of Oranga Tamariki, the reduction in employees from regional offices hampered its ability to work with regional providers.
28. We are concerned with the wording on page 45, citing concerns about "the interaction between principles of diversity/inclusion and merit that have emerged through the Public Service Census." The implication that diversity and inclusion are somehow at odds with merit is unhelpful when diversity and performance tend to be positively correlated.
29. We recommend that you amend the LTIB to emphasise the way public service integrity is strengthened when organisations' workforce reflects the communities they serve, including ethnic and regional diversity.

Thank you for considering Te Pai Ora SSPA's feedback. We would be happy to discuss this submission with you if you have any further questions.