



5th December 2024

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Ref: OIA-2024/25-0485

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act request relating to March 2020 Covid-19 Cabinet Papers

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 25 November 2024. You requested:

- 1. DPMC has, on its webpage, a section headed "COVID-19 Response 2020", and says that The table below contains documents dated in 2020 regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a document listed in the table that is dated 18 March 2020, described as Establishment of COVID-19 Engagement Mechanism for Business. The problem is that the paper associated with this link is to a Cabinet briefing paper Establishment of COVID-19 engagement Mechanisms for Business that is dated 18 March 2021. It is not a paper from 2020.
Is there in fact a paper to Cabinet dated 18 March 2020 (or any paper in March 2020) about engagement with the business sector on COVID-19 issues and if so could I have a copy of this paper?*
- 2. I understand that on 22 March 2020 there was a telephone conference involving the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance with business leaders that included Rob Fyfe, Stephen Tindall, Sam Morgan and others. Could I please have a copy of any notes retained by DPMC of this phone conference and I would also like to know the names, or at least the titles, of any government officials who participated in the phone conference.*
- 3. Following the phone conference, Rob Fyfe sent an email to all those who took part in the phone conference. Parts of this email have been made public, but could I please have a copy of the complete email.*

I have added numbering for ease of references and will respond to your questions individually below:

- 1. Is there in fact a paper to Cabinet dated 18 March 2020 (or any paper in March 2020) about engagement with the business sector on COVID-19 issues and if so could I have a copy of this paper?*

We have reviewed the publication, and it appears the date recorded in the table is in error. I can confirm that a review of all records has not identified any paper of this title from March 2020 and the paper referenced is a 2021 paper. We will take steps to amend the website so this date is reflected correctly to avoid any confusion in future. Thank you for drawing this to our attention.

- 2. Could I please have a copy of any notes retained by DPMC of this phone conference and I would also like to know the names, or at least the titles, of any government officials who participated in the phone conference.*

Your request for a copy of notes relating to this telephone conference retained by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) is refused under section 18(e) of the

Act as the information requested does not exist, or despite reasonable efforts cannot be found.

Your request for the names and titles of any government officials in attendance is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information is not held by DPMC and I do not believe this is held by any other party subject to the Act.

3. *Following the phone conference, Rob Fyfe sent an email to all those who took part in the phone conference. Parts of this email have been made public, but could I please have a copy of the complete email.*

I have decided to release Rob Fyfe's email, subject to information being under section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals. In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act. No public interest has been identified that would be sufficient to outweigh the reasons for withholding that information.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Clare Ward
Executive Director
Strategy, Governance and Engagement

From: Rob Fyfe

Sent: 22/03/2020 8:49 pm

To: s9(2)(a)

Cc: Sam Morgan ; Stephen Tindall ; Nick Mowbray ; Craig Heatley

s9(2)(a)

Subject: Summary of today's conversation and next steps

Prime Minister, Minister Robertson. (Grant I don't have the Prime Minister's direct email – if you could forward for me please)

Our outtake from the session and the actions and next steps that were agreed;

Aligned Principles

- We need to mobilise this as a war effort
- The business community is being under-leveraged. We committed to mobilise the business community in support of the national interest and behind our Prime Minister and leader
- We must act with urgency, every day of delay results in more body bags! (we are acutely aware that Governments are democratic and consensus driven entities and Businesses are ostensibly autocratic) The Prime Minister is committed to a fast escalation to alert level 3 and then 4 with a goal of containing and then eradicating this COVID 19.

Next Steps

1. The Prime Minister will make a further announcement tomorrow – we believe it is essential that the language is sufficient explicit to shock people into action. We want those people who can keep their kids home from school to be motivated to do so following this announcement, we want retailers shutting down their stores, we want bar and restaurant owners to choose to close down their businesses and not wait to the formal announcement of level 4, hopefully later in the week.
2. We agreed that I would step into a role to work alongside the Government leaders to align and leverage the business effort behind the national 'war response effort'. To be successful it is essential that this role is mandated to sit alongside Mike Bush to be able influence and contribute to key decision making and enable him and I to build a highly effective public/private partnership to harness all the resources of the country behind our single unifying purpose and thus allowing;
 - a. The urgent progression to Level 4
 - b. The functioning of society through the duration of Level 4, and
 - c. The resumption of economic and domestic community activity as the country is progressively released from lock down.
3. Mike and I will require a financial authority that allows us to move fast and spend money where required to achieve turnaround of hours, not days.
4. It is key that Mike and I have totally transparency of everything going on – I have discussed and agreed with Mike that I will base myself alongside him in Wellington. I will arrive tomorrow and stay indefinitely.
5. It's essential the Prime Minister communicate the role she has asked me to play as soon as possible as this will accelerate me engaging the wider business community.
6. We believe our communications voice in support of (not against) Government is a valuable tool to galvanise and shock people into action and to get the country and business to mobilise behind Government – we want to work collaboratively with the Prime Minister/Government to that end. I will act as the coordination point to this end.
 - a. Specifically, we believe it critical that business leaders are galvanised behind our Prime Minister and the national interest.
7. An immediate priority is the access to test kits and testing capability and the provision of PPE and protocols for personnel involved in essential services through the duration of Level 4. Nick Mowbray is our initial lead, since our conversation this afternoon he has been in contact with Ian Town from the Ministry of Health and confirmed that he can source 3 million masks and a few hundred thousand test kits. This is a fraction of what we will need as we head in to Level 4 and beyond and we will continue to actively work this channel.
8. An immediate priority is the establishment of a new whatsapp health communication

platform to remove the bottle neck of Healthline. Sam and his team are working on this and expect to have a solution up and running within 72 hours.

- a. This is templated (and uses the same codebase) as the recently released WHO application but localised to NZ. (<https://www.whatsapp.com/coronavirus/who>). This application will be invaluable for information but also grow quickly to enable NZ to do daily check-ins on people's health status and get ahead of where the virus is hiding. Sam to liaise with Dr Ashley Bloomfield.
9. The Prime Minister highlighted some specific challenges in Decile 1 and 2 communities. Both Stephen Tindal through the Tindal Foundation and Sam Morgan have expertise and they are able to help solution some of the unique challenges with these communities and can mobilise these resources immediately. Sam has already appointed a leader from his team to coordinate in this space (Alex Fala, former Vend CEO). Acknowledging the levers Grant has are much larger but we can come at this from the ground up.
10. I will debrief with Graeme Hart's team to understand any insights gained from their lockdown simulation exercise to capture any learnings
These are my immediate priorities for the next 24 hours. Can you please confirm that we are aligned both on the intent and scope of the role to ensure we are setting me and the initiative up for success?

Many thanks ... Rob

Rob Fyfe

The People Shop 26 Minnehaha Avenue, Takapuna, Auckland 0622, New Zealand

s9(2)(a)

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