

News Release

Embargoed until 10am Thursday 6 October

Release of Chief Inspector's Report into MECF

Please attribute to Ray Smith, Chief Executive, Department of Corrections.

Today I'm releasing the Chief Inspector of Corrections' report into allegations of "Fight Clubs" and prisoners' access to cell phones and contraband in the Mount Eden Corrections Facility in 2015.

Small parts of the report have been redacted for security and privacy reasons but I've released as much as possible as I believe the public has a strong interest in the operation of this prison.

Serco has been held to account for the failings highlighted in the report. In July last year the Department 'Stepped In' and took over the management of the prison. In December last year Corrections announced that Serco's contract would not be renewed.

On 4 April I announced that the Department had reached a settlement with Serco of \$8 million that covered the cost of the Step In and performance notices. Serco also did not receive performance payments for the 2015/16 year totalling \$3.1 million.

Following the non-renewal of its contract Serco began a labour supply arrangement after which Corrections will fully staff the prison by March 2017.

Since stepping in to manage MECF we have strengthened searches for contraband, ensured staffing levels are adequate and maintained and improved the kitchen ensuring that hygiene standards are met. Staff are now having further training and we've introduced extra security arrangements for them. A Corrections Prison Director and Deputy Director have been appointed.

The delivery of medical assistance is also being strengthened and other areas identified for improvement such as early access to the prisoner phone system have been addressed.

There are recommendations which relate to the monitoring of contracts in prisons by Corrections which I endorse.

I have strengthened our monitoring of the private provision of custodial services as recommended and gone further.

There are extra monitors at Auckland South Corrections Facility as well as new special monitors made up of former Prison Directors who provide additional levels of assurance over our monitoring processes. In addition I have established a Major Outsourced Contract Advisory Board that provides direct advice to me on the strategic approach of such contracts.

The Board is independently chaired by Geoff Dangerfield, formerly Chief Executive of NZTA.

I have appointed a new Deputy Chief Executive, Commercial Services, with responsibility for outsourced services and the monitors have new reporting lines, improved training and reporting procedures.

The report makes 21 recommendations designed to improve the functions of MECF, and where appropriate, the wider Corrections system. Many of the recommendations would have been directed to Serco but have been overtaken by the Department's Step-In decision in July 2015.

I have accepted the Chief Inspector's recommendations in full - 13 have been completed and 8 are under action. A summary of the recommendations is attached.

At the time I commissioned the Chief Inspector to investigate MECF I also asked him to look into the other prisons in New Zealand to ensure that the same issues regarding violence and contraband were not putting prisoners, the staff and the public at risk. I am also releasing this report, with some redactions for security reasons.

The report found no evidence of fight club activity at the eight prisons inspected.

From time to time the management of prisons can fail, be they public or privately operated.

It's important that we learn from these experiences to make the Corrections system stronger.

The Chief Inspector's report is important reading for all those involved in prison management as it catalogues what can happen when control systems fail.

ENDS

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