

#### 4. UPDATE ON CENTRAL GOVERNMENT POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS - JUNE

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The purpose of this report is to update committee members of recent government policy announcements which will impact on areas of concern to the Community Services Committee

##### **SCHOOL STAFFING REVIEW**

Education Minister Trevor Mallard released details of a major review of school staffing. The Minister will chair the Review Group. Former Hutt Valley High School principal Graeme Marshall will be the project manager and deputy chairperson.

The Review Committee is charged with advising the Minister of Education on overall staffing levels for the schools sector as a whole. This should include consideration of the workloads of teachers and principals, changes to the curriculum, Maori students' education, Pacific students' education, and other educational needs.

Recommendations should address the following:

1. A mechanism for improved staffing levels for small rural schools which will be able to be implemented from the beginning of the 2001 school year. The Committee should provide early recommendations on this issue.
2. Recommended arrangements for improving staffing for the school sector in the medium and long term, with particular attention to the needs of small rural secondary and area schools, low decile schools, and schools with teaching principals.
3. A phased implementation plan. This could include up to 10 steps, able to be implemented in a planned sequence to achieve the review's objectives by the end of the time period.
4. Recommendations should take into account the Government's Budget priorities, and teacher supply projections.

The Review Committee will provide recommendations by 28 February 2001.

##### **NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST CHILDREN'S DAY**

Social Services and Employment Minister Steve Maharey announced that New Zealand will have its own Children's Day on **29 October** this year.

Children's Day 2000 is a joint initiative between government and community agencies. Primary agencies involved with the day are Child, Youth and Family, Barnardos and the Office of the Commissioner for Children. The day, chosen to occur on the last Sunday each October, will hopefully become an annual event where all communities in New Zealand are encouraged to have special activities where adults spend time with children.

*Spending time with children* is the major theme of Children's Day. There are four other key messages:

- love and affection;
- praise and encouragement;
- listening and talking; and
- new experiences

Children's Day has its own web site, [www.childrensday.org.nz](http://www.childrensday.org.nz), and will distribute a Children's Day kit to community groups in August with suggestions and ideas about what to do with children on 29 October.

#### **EDUCATION COUNCIL**

Education Minister Trevor Mallard announced the establishment process and funding for a new Education Council to be operating by the middle of next year. This year's Budget included \$400,000 extra funding over the next four years to run the education council.

The Education Council will be an expansion of the Teacher Registration Board and will help the Government in its objectives to lift standards in education. As well as the responsibility for registering teachers, the Education Council will have a much greater role in setting standards for registration, including looking at pre-service education and training, and ongoing professional development within the sector. It will cover both the compulsory and early childhood education sectors.

The Education Council will also have responsibility for administering the Government's policy of ensuring that all people who regularly work in schools and early childhood centres are subject to the police and character checks that are part of teacher registration.

#### **INCOME INEQUALITY ONE OF HIGHEST IN OECD**

**A Treasury paper, "The Changes in New Zealand's Income Distribution", shows the typical household's income fell during the 80s and 90s and we have now one of the highest levels of income inequality in the OECD.**

The report commissioned from independent economist and statistician Des O'Dea, is a summary of the recent research on that topic. The report says income disparities increased most rapidly in the 1980s and continued at a slower pace in the 1990s.

It also says New Zealand now appears to have one of the highest levels of inequality in the OECD and has risen substantially relative to other countries. Reasons for the change are less than clear cut and Mr O'Dea said there were a lot of grey areas.

#### **BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES**

\$1.6M has been set aside in the Budget for a pilot scheme in 2000/01 giving local communities greater control over the way social services operate in their area.

The funding will enable up to six communities from around New Zealand to trial devolved decision-making and resource distribution. Child, Youth and Family will support the communities as they develop their own approaches to decision-making, representation and allocation of funds to services.

#### **NEW ZEALAND HEALTH STRATEGY**

A draft of the New Zealand Health Strategy has been launched. Report and draft submission is on the Community Services agenda for the July meeting..

#### **HEALTH STRUCTURE**

The structure of the new Ministry of Health, which incorporates many of the roles and functions of the Health Funding Authority, has now been finalised and it will formally come into place on 1 July.

The Minister is currently interviewing for appointments to the transitional district health boards. The Ministry is reportedly on track for District Health Boards (DHBs) to be set up in November when new legislation comes into force.

#### **DISTRICT HEALTH BOARDS ESTABLISHMENT SUPPORT UNIT**

The Ministry of Health has recently set up the District Health Board Establishment Support Unit based within the Ministry. The new Unit is led by Keith Marshall, and is expected to stay together until the DHB elections in 2001, when the transition phase will be completed.

#### **PUBLIC HEALTH AND DISABILITY BILL**

The 'New Zealand Public Health and Disability Bill' will be introduced to Parliament in July. The aims to meet a comprehensive range of health and disability support needs.

#### **NEW ZEALAND DISABILITY STRATEGY**

The New Zealand Disability Reference Group has met for the first time. The Group will advise the Ministry of Health about the content of the Disability Strategy, and how best to consult with people with disabilities and the wider disability community.

The Minister for Disability Issues, Hon Ruth Dyson has recently started a newsletter called *Participate* to provide information about developments in the disability area.

#### **APPRENTICESHIPS BILL**

The bill is expected to be introduced to Parliament late June. Modern Apprenticeship pilots begin in July. Draft legislation setting out the Government's new Apprenticeship programme, which is to expand nationwide from the start of 2001, has been considered by an industry reference group established by Skill New Zealand.

The reference group comprises the Association of Polytechnics in NZ, the Council of Trade Unions, the Employers' Federation, the Association of Private Education Providers, the Association of Maori Private Providers, and the Industry Training Federation.

#### **FIRST RAFT OF CHANGES AT WORK AND INCOME ANNOUNCED**

The first phase of changes to the way the Department of Work and Income deals with those receiving benefits were announced. The Government has been working with beneficiary advocacy groups to refocus the organisational culture and practices of the Department. A number of proposals advanced by benefit advocate groups, which can be implemented at no extra cost, are being actioned immediately, while a further series of proposals requiring additional Government expenditure will require much more careful consideration.

Changes now in place following the work, or currently being implemented are:

- re-examining all debts established over \$5,000, including a check by a person not involved in the original decision;
- the Benefit Review Committee process has been reviewed and improved procedures established;
- renaming the Benefit Crime Units as Benefit Control Units. The way benefit control statistics are reported is also being looked at to ensure they are as fair and accurate as possible;
- reviewing the existing procedures and practices employed by benefit control officials;
- revisiting existing debt cases where overpayment is being recovered at a rate exceeding \$40 per week;
- those receiving benefits will no longer be referred to as "customers".

The Government will also introduce legislation this year to scrap the work capacity trial, scrap the Community Wage and establish an Unemployment Benefit and Sickness Benefit, and make community work voluntary.

Advocacy groups, the Government and the Department will continue working together to make improvements to the organisational culture and practices of the Department.

#### **Chairman's**

**Recommendation:** That the information be received.