

Office of Hon Nicola Willis

Minister of Finance
Minister for the Public Service
Minister for Social Investment
Associate Minister of Climate Change



29 OCT 2024

Jewel Weekes
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Dear Jewel

Official Information Request Reference MOIA 2024-0283

I refer to your official information request dated 26 September 2024 about the Government's recent working from home announcement. For ease of reference, I have listed each of your questions and my response below:

- 1. You state 'Updated guidance for the public service will make clear that working from home is not an entitlement and must be agreed and monitored.'***
 - If flexibility is mentioned as an option and possibility in the Collective Agreement, does this mean everything else mentioned in the Collective Agreement is also 'not an entitlement' of government working kaimahi? A common definition of 'entitlement' is the fact of having a right to something.***
 - So do all government kaimahi have also no entitlement / right to anything else mentioned in their Collective Agreement, including their income?***

Individual agencies are responsible for the interpretation and application of collective agreements. Chief executives will now need to ensure compliance with legal and contractual obligations while adequately reflecting the government's clarified expectations.

- 2. You state, 'While carefully defined working from home arrangements can benefit workers and employers, if the pendulum swings too far in favour of working from home, there are downsides for employers and employees. That's even before we consider the effects for the CBD retailers, restaurants and cafes.'***
 - Where have you noticed the pendulum swinging too far? What explicit examples are there in government departments that working from home has caused a compromise to the performance of employees and agency objectives?***
- 3. You state that, 'Data is not currently being centrally collected by the Public Service Commission regarding the prevalence of working from home arrangements.'***
 - If data is not being collected by PSC for the prevalence of working from home, where are you getting your data from for said prevalence to make an announcement such as the new work-from-home guidance for public service? And, if there is currently no data being collected, wouldn't a better option to have been to record prevalence before making changes to see if said changes were actually necessary?***

I do not hold a list of individuals, businesses, and public servants that have contacted me on these matters. However, I have regular free and frank conversations with individuals, businesses, and public servants about the Public Service and its working from home arrangements. I do not hold records of the dates of these conversations.

I am therefore refusing these parts of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA on the grounds that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

4. You state, 'agencies must actively monitor the prevalence and impact of working from home agreements, and be able to regularly report to the Public Service Commission about the number and nature of the agreements they have in place.'

- **How are you suggesting that agencies actively monitor the prevalence and impact of working from home agreements? Or are you expecting that the idea of what monitoring means should be decided by the Leaders/Managers?**
- **What will be done to avoid micromanagement and lack of understanding and flexibility from managers/leaders, including what impact this can have on their mental health and work relationship?**

It is for individual agencies to assess the best way for them to monitor the prevalence and impact of working from home arrangements. I have asked the Public Service Commission to support agencies to implement the Government's expectations, including ensuring information about working from home arrangements is captured in a way that allows for easy comparison between agencies and I intend to then make this information public in a user-friendly way early next year.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Hon Nicola Willis

Minister for the Public Service