our vision
The Department of Internal Affairs is a recognised leader in public service – known for innovation, essential to New Zealand, and trusted to deliver

our purpose
The Department of Internal Affairs serves and connects citizens, communities and government to build a strong, safe nation

outcomes we contribute to
Strong, Sustainable Communities/Hapū/Iwi
Safer Communities
Trusted Records of New Zealand Identity

We also have a key Departmental objective
Executive Government is Well Supported

our workplace principles
We value people
We act with integrity
We provide outstanding service
annual report

for the year ended 30 June 2006

Presented to the House of Representatives
Pursuant to Section 44 (1) of the Public Finance Act 1989
This annual report highlights the progress we have made, as one organisation, in helping to serve and connect citizens, communities and government to build a strong, safe nation.

In March 2006, the Government set out its priorities for the coming years, in the three themes of economic transformation; families – young and old; and national identity. The Department quickly identified how these themes could provide a unifying description of the purpose of the Department’s work across activities, which may at first sight seem highly diverse. The Department, as a single organisation united around a common approach to the tasks with which it is entrusted, is determined to play its part in New Zealand’s economic transformation, in supporting families – young and old, and in building our identity as a nation.

During 2005/06 we have made progress in a number of areas that contribute to these themes, by working towards our outcomes – strong, sustainable communities/New Zealand identity – as well as our objective to support Executive Government.

Working to progress economic transformation

Our work with local government, and in community development and grant funding, contributes to local economic development: building social capital, infrastructural services, environmental management, facilities development and heritage protection. This local infrastructure is needed to achieve effective economic transformation. Transforming the economy is dependent on a series of decisions and relationships at individual, local and national level. The Department contributes in each of these areas.

Good local government begins with good law. The Department continues to ensure that the legislative framework surrounding local government is working effectively. The Local Government Law Reform Bill 2006 resulted in amendments to eight Acts. These changes gave more certainty and provided appropriate tools for local authorities.

The Department is planning for future evaluation of local government law with a long-term evaluation strategy for three major pieces of local government legislation, taking us through to 2013.

To help people understand local government, and how to participate in local and regional council decision-making, we introduced a new website on the local government sector, www.localcouncils.govt.nz. During the year we have been working with the local government sector to undertake an examination of local government funding, with a report due later in 2006.

The Government’s Digital Strategy is about using the power of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance New Zealanders’ lives. We contributed during the year through the Connecting Communities Strategy: successfully implementing the Community Partnership Fund (providing funding for community information and ICT projects), and commencing the UPLIFT course to take ICT skills into the community. New funding has allowed further development of the successful CommunityNet Aotearoa website, using the Internet to support and link community organisations.

The new Significant Community-Based Project Fund, announced by the Prime Minister in July 2005, is administered by the Department using the expertise built up from its ongoing administration of other grant schemes. The fund has particular reference to arts, culture and heritage, sport and recreation, conservation and environment, tourism, and economic development. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Internal Affairs announced Cabinet decisions on applications, with $19.3 million being allocated to six projects.

The Department enhanced the security of the New Zealand passport, the key to New Zealanders’ ease of travel throughout the world, with the introduction of the e-passport. As a trading nation, New Zealanders

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and other countries need the highest level of trust in our documents of identity, especially passports. The Department completed the roll-out of the New Zealand e-passport in November 2005. The e-passport meets international standards for passport security, and ultimately ensures that New Zealanders maintain visa-free access to more than 50 countries worldwide.

Supporting families – young and old

Families, in their various forms, are the basis of community. The Department’s involvement with families starts with the registration of births, and continues through the registration of marriages, civil unions and deaths. Families are also supported directly by our community development work, our support for volunteering and our work to protect New Zealand from objectionable material. Communities are also supported by our regulation work to ensure that gambling is lawful, fair and honest and that it benefits the community. In our censorship and gambling work we continued to implement new legislation and enhance our public education, monitoring and enforcement role. We made significant progress in 2005/06 with the electronic monitoring system for non-casino gaming machines. This is on target for roll-out by March 2007 and will improve monitoring and auditing across the sector.

The Department supports the work of the Ministry of Health to reduce problem gambling, and families throughout New Zealand benefit from the New Zealand practice of returning gambling proceeds to the community.

Families are also indirectly supported by the local government and community work of the Department and by the respect for family cultural traditions supported by the Office of Ethnic Affairs.

To minimise the impact of disasters the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management is urging people to “have a plan for you and your family”. In April 2006 the Minister of Civil Defence launched the CDEM in Schools programme “What’s the Plan Stan?”. This resource is aimed at involving students in an educational programme that focuses on disasters and emergencies, to help them prepare and give them the skills to act in a safe manner. Increased student awareness and understanding of the risks may also act as a prompt for students’ parents and families to be better prepared. In June 2006 a new civil defence and emergency management national education programme, “Get Ready Get Thru”, was successfully launched with a new website (www.getthru.govt.nz). This aims to get New Zealanders better prepared for disasters.

The Rates Rebate Scheme administered by the Department of Internal Affairs was enhanced during the year by increasing the income threshold for rebate entitlement and the amount of subsidy available to low-income homeowners on the cost of their rates. As a result, rates rebate claims are expected to substantially increase in 2006/07 in comparison to the 4,200 rebates granted in 2005/06.

Building national identity

We take pride in being the oldest government department and we expect to make an ongoing contribution to the development of New Zealanders’ sense of national identity. This year 25,895 people became New Zealanders at citizenship ceremonies conducted by local authorities and supported by the Department. In our stewardship role for birth, death, marriage, civil union and citizenship information we are, quite literally, the custodians of their records of national identity. In 2005/06 we continued to develop the services we offer in this area, implementing legislative changes to citizenship requirements and setting up the Human Assisted Reproductive Technology register.

Our Visits and Ceremonial team help to foster international relationships and to reflect New Zealand culture and heritage to a world audience through its work. For example, the team helped to organise the visit of the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and his entourage of over 200 Chinese delegates, putting together a programme of meetings that included bilateral talks with the New Zealand Prime Minister and a number of other Ministers.

New Zealand is becoming an increasingly diverse country and we need to recognise and enjoy the benefits of this diversity. The Department, particularly through the Office of Ethnic Affairs, acts as a point of contact between government and ethnic people, and provides information and advice about and for ethnic communities. For example, as part of the Government’s Settlement Strategy we have developed a Building Bridges Programme with members of Muslim communities to work on issues of integration, public awareness and dialogue. This work contributes to New Zealand’s sense of national identity by assisting New Zealanders to learn more about each other. The Department has also undertaken policy work on the nature and value of New Zealand citizenship.

In May 2006 the Department celebrated a 20-year investment and commitment to the Community...
Organisation Grants Scheme. Every year over $11 million in government funding administered by the Department of Internal Affairs is distributed to more than 3,000 community groups. Thirty-seven local volunteer distribution committees make decisions on grant applications from their local communities. The grants support a host of community activities that help people to take pride in who and what we are as New Zealanders.

Contributing to the Development Goals for the State Services

The Development Goals for the State Services, launched by the State Services Commission in 2005, provide guidance for “how” we do our work. As Chief Executive, I chair one of the development goals subcommittees, working with colleagues and stakeholders to develop a coordinated and accessible State sector which uses technology to transform the provision of services for New Zealanders.

The Department provides a number of services that benefit the wider State sector, from the virtually instant interpretation of Language Line, to the development during 2005/06 of a new Evidence of Identity Standard as part of enhancing identity verification across the State sector. The Department also progressed a number of initiatives that use technology to provide more responsive and accessible services. Projects to deliver online access to information included implementation of Grants Online, introducing direct online lodgement of death information by funeral directors, and the launch of a new civil defence website, www.getthru.govt.nz.

Enhancing the capability and capacity of the Department

A series of reviews over recent years identified the need to invest in the capability and capacity of the Department, and additional funding was received for this purpose. Capability has been enhanced in the corporate areas, additional resources for ethnic services have been located in the regions, and the capacity of the Visits and Ceremonial team has been increased in response to increased demand for their services.

A major exercise was undertaken to identify how best to use additional resources to strengthen capability and capacity for civil defence and emergency management. I am pleased to report that the new Civil Defence management structure is now in place, and recruitment is well under way for additional permanent staff in the civil defence and emergency management area.

Our focus for 2006/07 is on implementing and consolidating these changes and ensuring they deliver the benefits envisaged.

As Chief Executive, I rely on the dedication of staff in all parts of the Department. Working together as one organisation, we have achieved significant results for citizens, communities and government. I look forward to achieving even more in 2006/07 as we work together to build a strong, safe nation.

CHRISTOPHER BLAKE
Chief Executive

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