



12 JUL 2016

Dear

On 25 May 2016 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information about loans made for emergency accommodation.

Prior to 1 July 2016 Work and Income provided recoverable assistance to pay for emergency accommodation. Recoverable assistance is for beneficiaries and people on low incomes to help them meet immediate and essential needs like paying late utility bills or rent, buying essential household appliances, or meeting urgent needs for children. The Ministry grants these to people as long as they meet the income and asset test and are unable to meet the cost from any other source. Repayments are negotiated with the client based on their circumstances. Repayment of the debt is set at levels which people can afford.

- *The number of people who have applied for, and the number granted, loans to cover short-term accommodation*

At this point it is not possible to provide you with the total amount of emergency housing debt or the total number of people who have received recoverable financial assistance for emergency housing. While the Ministry records the type of hardship assistance provided for accommodation, it does not separate out if that assistance is for emergency housing. Details about the type of accommodation assistance provided are recorded on notes in client files. To provide this information Ministry staff would need to review thousands of files. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service. The Ministry is developing reporting of this assistance which will be provided quarterly and available from September 2016.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

The Government has recently announced funding for 3000 emergency housing places per year, allocating \$41.1 million over the next four years for both contracted

emergency housing providers and a new emergency housing grant which has been available since 1 July 2016. This new Special Needs Grant for emergency housing does not need to be paid back. This can be paid for up to seven days while people work with us to identify alternative housing options.

The new dedicated non-recoverable Special Needs Grant will allow the Ministry to better track demand for emergency housing assistance.

You have requested the following information:

- *The amount of those loans, broken into brackets - e.g. the number of loans between \$0 - \$500, \$501 - \$1000, \$1001 - \$5001, \$5001 - \$10,000, \$10,001+*
- *How many of those loans have been repaid, how many are in dispute, how many have been written off by MSD?*
- *The regional breakdown of where those clients are in the country - and can Auckland please be split if possible, into Central, South, East, West and North? Other regions as per council or other boundary line*

The Ministry is unable to report information about loans made for emergency housing purposes, where those people live and the number of people who have repaid the loans, as this information is held on notes in individual files and Ministry staff would need to review thousands of client files. As such this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

- *Can you also please provide some information as to whether the accommodation is selected in conjunction with advice from WINZ? Or is the client free to spend the money at any accommodation provider they choose? Has WINZ negotiated any long-term rates at a lower per night cost for those clients who are staying on longer than anticipated?*

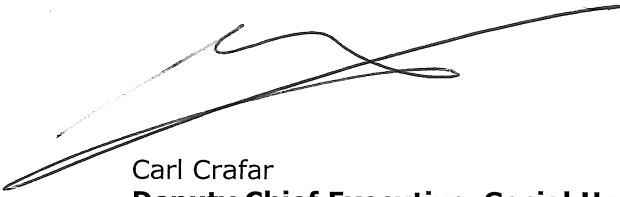
When clients require emergency housing assistance, Work and Income helps to facilitate this by providing a list of known suppliers who are able to accommodate people at short notice. Most regional offices have their own list of providers that they may refer people to. Alternatively clients may have arranged their own short term accommodation.

Work and Income makes payments for emergency accommodation directly to providers. At this stage there has been no wholesale negotiation with providers to reduce rates for longer periods of stay, however, it is possible that discounted rates may be agreed on a case-by-case basis. Emergency accommodation grants are an interim measure to address an urgent need for accommodation while people work with us to identify alternative housing options.

I hope you find this information concerning emergency housing helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsman
PO Box 10-152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Crafar', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Carl Crafar
Deputy Chief Executive, Social Housing