



Dear

On 14 June 2017 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information held regarding spending by the Ministry on taxis or ride-sharing apps.

For the sake of clarity, I will address each element of your request below:

- *Details of the amount spent by your organisation on taxis, from 1 June 2016 until 1 June 2017. For the avoidance of doubt, for this information, please do not include any spending on Uber, or any other similar ride-sharing apps.*

The Ministry of Social Development employs almost 7,000 staff at more than 230 locations throughout New Zealand. The Ministry constantly seeks ways to provide more efficient and effective services to meet changes in demand and provide value for taxpayer money.

The services that the Ministry delivers to New Zealanders require staff to travel throughout the country. Much of the travel undertaken by Ministry staff occurs within Work and Income, which has offices across New Zealand.

Some of the taxi costs outlined in this response include the amounts of taxi expenses for people external to the Ministry as these cannot easily be separated out. For example, the Ministry pays for representatives from non-government organisations to attend advisory groups meetings.

In the recording of expense claims, a specific code is used to allow the cost to be isolated in order to better understand the needs of staff and identify possible improvements in efficiency. If a staff member were to use Uber or another ride-sharing app and make an expense claim for that, they are likely to interpret that as a taxi cost and apply this code. This means that this data may include some Uber or ride-sharing service costs.

Please find attached a table showing the total amount spent by the Ministry on taxis, broken down by month from 1 June 2016 to 31 May 2017. Please note that prior to 1 April 2017 these costs included those incurred by Child, Youth and Family, for example by social workers escorting children and young persons in the care of the Chief Executive or on youth justice orders.

On 1 April 2017, the Government established the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki, for which Hon Anne Tolley is Minister for Children. The new Ministry is responsible for ensuring vulnerable children and their families and whānau get the services they need, and that agencies work together to take a broader view of children and young people who are at significant risk of harm now or into the future. The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki incorporates Child, Youth and Family, some Ministry of Social Development and Community Investment functions, and the Children's Action Plan Directorate, including Children's Teams, ViKI and Vulnerable Children's Hub.

The establishment of the new Ministry involves travel costs for project team members visiting sites and coordinating with staff at all levels in the development of a new operating model for the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki. There has also been increased travel for staff members who have been appointed to positions which required them to come to National Office or to travel to various sites in order to connect with different managers and colleagues.

- *Details of the amount spent by your organisation on Uber, or other similar ride-sharing apps, from 1 June 2016 until 1 June 2017. For the avoidance of doubt, please do not include any spending on taxis.*

The Ministry has no specific arrangements or records relating to expenditure on Uber or other ride-sharing apps. As explained previously, most of these costs are likely to be interpreted as taxi costs in the expense claim process and will be included in the attached table. Any additional costs that may have been incurred by the Ministry relating to this will be held on individual expense claims, as will any details that may allow the isolation of these costs from taxi costs. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such I refuse your request 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.

- *Any policies or guidance that is followed by your organisation regarding staff's use of taxis or Uber.*

The use of taxis by Ministry staff is governed by the following financial policies:

1. Taxi chits/ cards must only be used for business purposes.
2. Employees must obtain prior approval from their Manager to use taxis.
3. Employees must always request the most direct route and immediately report any unreasonable charges to their manager.

Furthermore, taxi cards may only be used by the person to whom they are allocated, must be locked away in a safe place when not in use, and must be destroyed if the person to whom they are allocated leaves the Ministry. Monthly summaries are issued outlining the costs to the Budget Manager, who is responsible for ensuring that all expenditure meets audit requirements. A designated staff member must maintain a register of taxi cards and vouchers for the Budget Manager to check against the monthly taxi statement.

No specific policies exist to govern the use of Uber or other ride-sharing apps. However, each such expense would be considered in the same way as any other expense to the Ministry. The Ministry requires that all expenditure must be appropriate to the occasion, moderate and take into consideration the use of public funds. Furthermore, expenses are subject to the Ministry's standard tests of probity. These require that expenses be: reasonable, provide good value for money, relevant to the Ministry's goals and objectives, justifiable, and sustainable under public scrutiny. The Ministry expects that standard tests of probity be applied where it is the intention to incur or approve expenditure. These include:

- Does the expenditure support the goals of the Ministry?
- If so, what are the specific organisational benefits?
- Do the benefits outweigh any risks?
- Could the Ministry confidently justify this expenditure to the Minister, a taxpayer, a stakeholder or other interested party?
- Would stakeholders and other decision-makers share the same perception about the prudence of the actions in question?

Expenses are audited periodically to ensure that policies and delegated authorities have been adhered to.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and the attached table on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response to your request for information, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Merv Dacre
Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate Solutions

The total expenditure by the Ministry on taxi services from 1 June 2016 to 31 May 2017 broken down by month

	Child, Youth and Family	Work and Income	Other	Total
Jun 2016	\$27,572.20	\$54,447.82	\$46,821.95	\$128,841.97
Jul 2016	\$26,616.60	\$38,324.05	\$29,097.59	\$94,038.24
Aug 2016	\$23,099.55	\$52,186.49	\$40,779.27	\$116,065.31
Sep 2016	\$31,800.59	\$50,418.46	\$37,673.03	\$119,892.08
Oct 2016	\$40,114.39	\$44,789.85	\$36,362.76	\$121,267.00
Nov 2016	\$1,026.32	\$52,796.82	\$42,446.46	\$96,269.60
Dec 2016	\$29,176.19	\$42,304.88	\$40,929.43	\$112,410.50
Jan 2017	\$18,129.87	\$79,070.25	\$16,629.11	\$113,829.23
Feb 2017	\$17,225.91	\$35,498.05	\$41,076.46	\$93,800.42
Mar 2017	\$30,824.40	\$46,220.06	\$53,541.04	\$130,585.50
Apr 2017	\$0	\$41,246.56	\$25,051.02	\$66,297.58
May 2017	\$0	\$51,809.16	\$34,851.74	\$86,660.90
Total	\$245,586.02	\$589,112.45	\$445,259.83	\$1,279,958.3

Notes:

- The cost of taxi services is excluding GST.
- The cost associated with Child, Youth and Family dropped to \$0 on 1 April as all Child, Youth and Family functions were incorporated into the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki.
- The cost for Child, Youth and Family in November 2016 was significantly lower than normal due to a refund resulting from previous months' expenditure.
- The "Other" column includes all taxi costs accrued by the Ministry outside of Child, Youth and Family and Work and Income. This includes Policy, Social Housing, Corporate Solutions and a variety of other areas of the Ministry.