



08 NOV 2019



Dear 

On 13 September 2019, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

1. *How many complaints has MSD received about Auckland Astro Residences?*
2. *How many times has MSD used Auckland Astro Residences to house clients with children?*
3. *Why was Auckland Astro Residences only used to house people when there were no other options?*
4. *Does MSD still use Auckland Astro Residences to house clients?*
5. *What is the average amount paid to Auckland Astro Residences per MSD client?*
6. *Did MSD suspend business with Auckland Astro Residences while it was placed in liquidation?*

Auckland Astro Motel provided emergency accommodation for people in need who would otherwise have been homeless. Given the limited supply of emergency housing options, some people may have otherwise struggled to find emergency accommodation that is also affordable. The Ministry closely works with them to understand how they can support them to sustain their new accommodation on a long-term basis. The high cost of housing may mean that people will apply for an Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG), while they wait for a permanent housing solution.

In the first instance, local councils are responsible for Emergency Housing accommodation compliance from entities such as Auckland Astro Residences. The Ministry's regional housing teams pass on issues to the councils when they are identified. To ensure suppliers for emergency housing deliver accommodation to a suitable standard, the Ministry:

- checks in regularly with clients on issues or concerns with their accommodation when approving subsequent EH SNGs
- escalates concerns or complaints to the housing team who follow up directly with the motelier
- monitors all ongoing issues or complaints received in relation to EH SNG accommodation with moteliers.

For the sake of clarity, your questions are addressed in turn.

1. How many complaints has MSD received about Auckland Astro Residences?

Clients can provide feedback about emergency housing accommodation suppliers in various ways including face to face, phone, or email discussions with Ministry staff at Service Centres.

Most complaints received regarding EH SNG accommodation are addressed regionally on a case by case basis and the Ministry does not centrally report on this. Therefore, the Ministry is unable to provide you with this information in the form you have requested it. As such, this aspect of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act as it would require substantial manual research and collation to locate and prepare this information. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

However, while we cannot provide a comprehensive list of all complaints for the reasons above, we are aware that some complaints have been received about Astro. We are aware complaints have been made this year and last year on lack of linen, lack of kitchen utensils, and shortcomings on cleaning and servicing of rooms.

On two occasions in 2018 and 2019 we raised complaints with Astro and sought action on these. Those issues were resolved to our satisfaction.

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.

You may be interested to know that a point-in-time check of emergency housing accommodation was completed by the Ministry, primarily focusing on emergency housing providers where high numbers of our clients had stayed. The Ministry continues to monitor its clients' experience in the motels that were checked and resolve issues as they arise.

In this check, all regions completed a quality and service stocktake of their EH SNG accommodation suppliers between 28 February 2019 and 15 March 2019. The check largely focused on the motels used for emergency housing where the Ministry had received complaints in relation to quality and/or service. The Ministry's Regional Housing Managers/Advisors addressed these issues directly with the motelier. Please see enclosed for your information Table One, which contains the findings of the Ministry's stocktake as at 15 March 2019.

2 How many times has MSD used Auckland Astro Residences to house clients with children?

As needed, the Ministry will accommodate families who will require temporary housing at Auckland Astro Residences. These will include clients with children. In the Ministry's system, the grant of the EH SNG is recorded against a distinct client; however, the grant could include several family members.

Information about the number of family members is held on the individual client files, where it is needed for case management purposes. Please note, the urgent nature of emergency housing means that the Ministry's priority when helping is to help people with nowhere to stay find accommodation.

As such, I am unable to provide number of times the Ministry used Auckland Astro Residences to house clients with children under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. I have considered whether charging or extending the time to respond to this request would be appropriate but, on balance, feel that in doing so the greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

3 Why was Auckland Astro Residences only used to house people when there were no other options?

Emergency Housing is assistance of last resort. We endeavour to assist people into long-term housing, either in transitional housing, public housing, or private rentals, and only if those options are not available do we place people in Emergency Housing. Accordingly, the nature of emergency housing meant that Auckland Astro Residences was used to house people when there were no other options.

4 Does MSD still use Auckland Astro Residences to house clients?

We no longer use the motel as a supplier of emergency accommodation. Some individual clients may choose to stay there and apply for Accommodation Supplement from the Ministry. That is their decision.

5 What is the average amount paid to Auckland Astro Residences per MSD client?

Please find below Table Two that shows the number of distinct clients and the total amount paid to Auckland Astro residences for emergency housing for each quarter between 01 October 2016 to 30 June 2019.

Table Two: The number of distinct clients and the amount paid to Auckland Astro residences for emergency housing during the period 01 October 2016 to 30 June 2019 broken down by quarter.

Quarter Ending	Distinct Clients	Number Granted	Amount Approved
31-Dec-16	26	111	\$119,095.50
31-Mar-17	63	266	\$311,735.00
30-Jun-17	62	264	\$473,053.57
30-Sep-17	89	249	\$307,670.00
31-Dec-17	78	271	\$486,231.05
31-Mar-18	82	320	\$635,663.70
30-Jun-18	85	347	\$791,005.08
30-Sep-18	110	425	\$865,464.55
31-Dec-18	132	474	\$931,762.96
31-Mar-19	70	458	\$702,673.76
30-Jun-19	110	352	\$549,464.90

6 *Did MSD suspend business with Auckland Astro Residences while it was placed in liquidation?*

No. We were made aware in July 2018 that Astro had gone into liquidation. Astro gave us an assurance that they would trade out of this.

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 and any attached documents available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attachments 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 regarding Auckland Astro Residences, 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



Karen Hocking
General Manager Housing

Table One: Findings of the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) Stocktake, from 28 February 2019 to 15 March 2019.

Work and Income Region	Number of EH SNG Providers	Number of Complaints	Complaint Themes
Auckland	128	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of basic in-room kitchen items; lack of in-room furniture • Anti-social behaviour
Bay of Plenty	84	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rooms not regularly serviced • Lack of access to washing machines • Lack of access to all of motel amenities (pool, spa, games room)
Canterbury	48	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour/gang activity • Dirty and old facilities • Lack of smoke alarms
Central	48	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour • Motel owner over familiar with guests
East Coast	29	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour/gang activity
Nelson	52	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old facilities with ventilation issues
Northland	24	0	
Southern	34	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour
Taranaki	17	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour/sex workers • Dirty and old facilities • Motel owner's interactions with vulnerable guests
Waikato	52	0	
Wellington	43	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-social behaviour/gang activity • Cleaning/servicing cycles • Motel manager's interactions with EH SNG clients