



06 AUG 2020

Dear

On 13 July 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- 1. Does MSD approve of emergency housing grants/social housing placements in mixed residential/hotel buildings? If so, are there any additional requirements or measures in place to ensure safety?*
- 2. The hotel has said that they perform (some) vetting on the tenants placed here, is this something that MSD allows?*
- 3. Given the high risk nature of some of these clients, does MSD provide extra financial assistance to cover this risk (i.e. funding cameras, security guards, etc.)?*
- 4. What obligations does MSD, or the hotels in question, have with regards to maintaining public safety with these new tenants?*
- 5. Is MSD or the hotel obliged to inform residents of the nature of these tenants?*
- 6. Given the nature of COVID overseas and the lack of tourism, is it known when MSD will stop pursuing hotels (particularly mixed residential spaces) as social housing solutions?*

As advised in an email to you on 22 July 2020, the Ministry will respond to those questions relating to emergency housing. You were also advised in this email that part of your request was transferred to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and they will provide a response in relation to transitional housing.

The Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place of residence, if any, and do not have access to other accommodation which is adequate for them or their family's needs. Assistance is generally granted for up to seven nights but can be extended dependant on individual circumstances.

The Ministry provides ongoing support to help people secure a long-term housing solution, including looking into public housing and private rental accommodation as an option, depending on the individual's circumstances.

More information about emergency housing can be found on the Ministry's website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-housing.html.

For the sake of clarity, I will respond to each of your questions in turn.

- 1. Does MSD approve of emergency housing grants/social housing placements in mixed residential/hotel buildings? If so, are there any additional requirements or measures in place to ensure safety?*

The Ministry does not have a contractual relationship with emergency housing providers. Where a person approaches the Ministry with an urgent housing need, and where they cannot access other accommodation adequate for their needs, the Ministry can pay an EH SNG to meet the costs of short-term commercial accommodation.

The Ministry accepts that hotels or motels are not a sustainable form of accommodation. However, our commitment is to ensure that people with an urgent housing need, have warm, safe, and dry accommodation while we assist them to identify a suitable, long-term housing situation.

While many clients identify their own emergency housing option, where required, Ministry staff will endeavour to identify the most appropriate accommodation for the individual, based on their needs, household composition, and characteristics.

The Ministry and the Department of Corrections operate a Memorandum of Understanding in respect of the provision of emergency housing to people serving orders and sentences in the community. This allows us to share information with Probation Services and ensures that people serving community sentences are supported by the appropriate agency and that the emergency housing option offered is suitable.

- 2. The hotel has said that they perform (some) vetting on the tenants placed here, is this something that MSD allows?*

The Ministry does not 'vet' emergency housing clients beyond the checks noted above in relation to people serving community sentences. Eligibility to receive the EH SNG is determined by an income, asset, and residency test, and by the immediacy of the person's needs.

The Ministry does not take a view on the vetting practices of commercial accommodation providers.

- 3. Given the high risk nature of some of these clients, does MSD provide extra financial assistance to cover this risk (i.e. funding cameras, security guards, etc.)?*

As noted above, the Ministry does not contract with emergency housing providers, rather it provides financial assistance to eligible individuals to meet the cost of short-term commercial accommodation. As such, the Ministry does not provide additional funding to accommodation suppliers for, inter alia, additional security.

The Ministry contracts with social service providers to deliver housing support services to people living in emergency housing. Our support services providers work with accommodation suppliers and clients to ensure that any instances of anti-social behaviour are identified and addressed at an early stage.

An emergency housing security deposit is also available as security against loss (on the part of the supplier) arising from damage caused by Ministry clients. More information about security deposits is available here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/definitions/emergency-housing-security-deposit.html.

4. What obligations does MSD, or the hotels in question, have with regards to maintaining public safety with these new tenants?

The Ministry endeavours to ensure that our clients abide by the rules of stay set out by their accommodation supplier. Where we are made aware of issues in emergency housing, we attempt to work with the accommodation supplier and our clients to address those at an early stage.

Accommodation suppliers are responsible for providing a safe and sanitary environment for their guests, while the Police are responsible for maintaining public safety.

5. Is MSD or the hotel obliged to inform residents of the nature of these tenants?

As noted above, the Ministry provides financial assistance to individuals to meet the cost of short-term accommodation. Thus, the relationship is between the client and the accommodation supplier. In order to protect our clients' right to privacy, the Ministry does not share information with accommodation suppliers except where the client has given their consent.

The responsibilities of hoteliers are best answered by them, or by Tenancy Services (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment). Contact information for Tenancy Services is available on their website: www.tenancy.govt.nz/about-tenancy-services/contact-us/.

6. Given the nature of COVID overseas and the lack of tourism, is it known when MSD will stop pursuing hotels (particularly mixed residential spaces) as social housing solutions?

The Ministry accepts that hotels/motels are not a sustainable form of accommodation, and are committed to reducing our reliance on these short-term emergency housing solutions. To support this, the Government has committed funding through Budget 2020 to deliver an additional 8,000 public and transitional housing places over the next four years.

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. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter 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 on emergency housing in mixed residential/hotel buildings, 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

PP. 

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