



9 June 2023

Tēnā koe

On 17 May 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *In a recent (5 May 2023) Radio New Zealand article headed: "Work and Income quietly removes 'sleeps over' as listed reason to not grant benefits" <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/489354/work-and-income-quietly-removes-sleeps-over-as-listed-reason-to-not-grant-benefits>*
- *It was stated: "Work and Income has deleted information from its website saying sole parents could be regarded as being in a relationship if they spend a few nights a week at each others' homes."*
- *I would like to request internal working documents and or papers prepared, in particular for the Minister, that led to this decision to delete the information requirement from the website.*

On 2 May 2023, the advocacy group Project Gender alerted the Ministry through our Media Team to an online services webpage on our website which included a line that wasn't consistent with other guidance on our policies and practices. It said that people should "think about whether" they stay at each other's house a few nights a week, alongside other aspects of what constitutes de-facto relationships. The line was removed that day to ensure consistency.

This online services webpage is not an authoritative guide to our policies and practices and is not used by our staff. We have two authoritative sources of guidance available online. One is the Manuals and Procedures (MAP) webpage which is based on our legislation. It is primarily used by staff and by advocates. For clients, there is also a plain English source of information about our policies on the main Work and Income website: www.workandincome.govt.nz

The webpage in question is an online resource that may come up when people are making applications. There has been no change in our policies as a result of this correction to the online services webpage, as this is not guidance used

by staff. Ministry staff would generally be unaware of the online services webpage.

There are no email chains, working documents or papers on this matter because the Media Team discussed the issue with the Digital Team (who are responsible for ensuring website copy reflects current policies) on 2 May 2023 when it heard from Project Gender, and as a result, the Digital Team corrected the website copy so that it was consistent with authoritative guidance on the primary Work and Income website.

Your request for internal working documents or papers prepared that led to the decision to delete this information off the website is therefore refused under section 18(e) of the Act as these documents do not exist.

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. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry'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, 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.

Ngā mihi nui

Bridget Saunders

Bridget Saunders
**Manager Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**