



5 February 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 15 December 2023, requesting information about the Ministry's assistance with utility bills.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

Under what circumstances, does the MSD accept to pay a utility bill on behalf of a client, and then:

1. Not pay the utility provider via standard operating procedures

The Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) staff follow the standard operating procedures when granting/declining a hardship assistance application. Each client's hardship assistance application is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

2. Hold the funds for 3 weeks

A hardship assistance application is not completed unless all relevant information has been provided by the client regardless of whether the client meets the qualifications for a hardship assistance application. Please refer to the Ministry's response to you on 3 July 2023 for more information on assistance with utility bills.

Once all information has been received by the Ministry and the application is approved, the Ministry pays the suppliers directly via direct debit, unless the supplier has a different preferred method of payment.

A hardship assistance application that is still waiting for information to be provided will be set to 'pending' status.

3. Pay the utility provider via eftpos in store

We refer you to the Ministry's response to you on 3 July 2023 and reiterate the circumstances where a Ministry supplier receives payment through a payment card.

For ease of reference, I have provided the relevant excerpt from the response letter below.

Depending on how the provider prefers to be paid, the Ministry will usually direct credit payments to the supplier for utility costs. For some smaller utility providers, or where power is pre-paid, the client will receive a

payment card with money loaded onto it, and clients have up to seven days to spend the money before this expires.

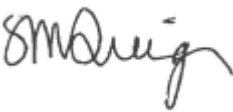
We note you are seeking information on the Ministry's assistance with utility bills. If your request is related to individual circumstances, we invite you to contact the Ministry and we will connect you with the appropriate team who will be able to assist you.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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 my decision on your request, 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

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Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services