



22 May 2024

Tēnā koe

### **Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your email of 23 April 2024, requesting information about Redirection of Benefit Payments made to City Garden Lodge.

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.

I have included some general information about the redirection of benefit payments and Housing Support Products at the end of this letter, for your further information.

*Was MSD diverting any benefit payments to the owners of City Garden Lodge at the time of the fire?*

I can confirm that as of 7 April 2024, the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) was redirecting some benefit payments to City Garden Lodge.

*If yes, how many client benefits was it diverting there?*

*What was the cost of the weekly diverted payments individually, and combined?*

I am refusing your request for the number of benefits being redirected and the cost of weekly diverted payments, individually and combined, under section 9(2)(a) of the Act in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

*We have heard the owners also required a \$2000 bond, which the company kept if a resident was removed for whatever reason. Did MSD pay this bond for any clients in any situation?*

The Ministry is unable to locate any records of tenancy bond payments of \$2,000 to the City Garden Lodge. Therefore, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(e) of the Act as this information does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

*Were any of them then forcibly removed from the property?*

Information of this nature is not collected on a consistent basis. If we have recorded such information, it would be held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, I refuse your request under section

18(f) of the 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.

### **General information about Redirection of Benefits**

In some circumstances, a client may request for a redirection of part of their benefit to meet accommodation costs. A Redirection of Benefit payment is where part or all of a client's benefit payment is paid directly to another person or organisation, instead of to the client. Redirection of Benefit can only occur where there is a good cause for this to be completed. Good cause includes factors such as:

- Would refusing the redirection of benefit place the client in a worse position? For example, will it result in the client being evicted from their accommodation.
- Is there a substantial history of frequently missed payments to the organisation, or eviction from accommodation, or disconnection from essential services such as power?
- Is there a supporting recommendation from a budget advisory service, mental health service, or other welfare or support agency?
- Has the client exhausted other viable alternatives?
- Has the client a history of frequent requests for extra assistance from Work and Income for the same purpose? For example, power disconnection or rent bond.

### **General information about Housing Support Products**

Housing Support Products are designed to support clients to access or retain housing. This includes people who are on the Social Housing register, in public housing or have otherwise contacted the Ministry for housing support. Housing Support Products provide additional assistance where the client's needs cannot be met by existing products and services that the Ministry currently offers. For example, Accommodation Supplement, Advance Payment of Benefit, Special Needs Grants, or Recoverable Assistance Payment.

Housing Support Products are discretionary and are based on a client's situation, their needs. The Ministry works with the client to explore and identify products and services that may be appropriate to their circumstances.

Tenancy Costs Cover is granted to a tenant so that if there are costs owing at the end of a tenancy that exceeds what was lodged as a bond payment, these additional costs will be paid directly to the landlord by the Ministry.

When people need to move, the one-off costs of moving to a new house can be a major barrier. Moving Assistance helps with the cost of moving household furniture, appliances, and personal effects. It is a recoverable form of assistance meaning clients need to repay the money, however repayment rates will be set at a level that will not cause undue hardship to a client.


If a client is going to lose their housing because they are unable to pay their overdue rent, they may be able to get Rent Arrears Assistance. A client does not need to be on a benefit to qualify for this assistance, but it is income and asset tested. More information can be found here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/housing/live-in-home/housing-costs/rent-arrears.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/housing/live-in-home/housing-costs/rent-arrears.html).

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](mailto: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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp. 

Magnus O'Neill  
**General Manager**  
**Ministerial and Executive Services**