



5 OCT 2018



Dear 

On 2 August 2018, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information about Work and Income health safety and security incidents, and positive feedback from clients for all of 2017 and the first six months of 2018.

The Ministry works hard to help New Zealanders to be safe, strong and independent. Within the parameters of government policy, the Ministry prides itself on providing a high quality service to New Zealanders who, because of their circumstances, require the Ministry's support. In the 2016/17 financial year, Ministry staff conducted 1.9 million face-to-face interviews with clients, and 7 million calls were answered by the Service Delivery Contact Centre.

The vast majority of these interactions do not pose a threat to staff and clients are able to be seen and assisted without any issues. However, as part of day-to-day work, staff see people who are vulnerable, frustrated, and managing complex personal situations. Occasionally these issues manifest in intimidating, threatening or inappropriate behaviour towards Ministry staff. The Ministry has zero tolerance of this type of behaviour.

The Ministry is committed to providing a safe working environment for staff and continually reviews security arrangements. Staff are required to report all security incidents in their office. Details are recorded in the Ministry's incident reporting database. Where appropriate, the incident is referred to Police for investigation. The Ministry also provides follow-up advice and support to any staff involved in such incidents, including support through the Employee Assistance Programme.

Clients exhibiting threatening behaviour will either be warned verbally or in writing. However, where warnings have been previously issued or in serious cases, such as assault or wilful damage to property, they may be served with a trespass notice.

The Ministry has made a concerted effort to introduce client-centred service culture changes exemplified by the client commitment including front of house changes in selected offices, the online Eligibility Guide, and changes to guidelines on benefit suspensions. These changes have been made in consultation with clients who are reacting positively. More information on these changes can be found here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/service-culture/index.html.

This response includes information about all Work and Income staff and sites, National Office, Regional Offices, and Contact Centres, however excludes Oranga Tamariki sites and associated staff including Child, Youth and Family prior to the date Oranga Tamariki was established on 1 April 2017.

In response to your first three questions, the Ministry's reporting system does not report incidents in the exact way that you have requested. As such your request for this information is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act as it is held in notes on individual files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. 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 requests as asked 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.

The Ministry has provided you with data similar to what you have requested, that the Ministry's reporting systems are able to report on.

For clarity, each of your questions are addressed in turn below.

1. Figures for Work and Income clients who have threatened to commit suicide in their dealings with Work and Income and when this threat has been officially reported.

When a threat of suicide or self-harm comes to the Ministry's attention, it is the Ministry's practice to immediately inform the Police. Work and Income staff guidelines and instructions for telephone callers who threaten suicide or self-harm are:

- o Alert your manager immediately and notify the Police.
- o Note everything the caller says and background noises.
- o Find out where the caller is now.
- o Ask if there is anyone with them.
- o Ask them if they have taken anything or are injured.
- o Keep caller on the phone for as long as possible or until a support person or the Police arrive at the location.

The guidelines and instructions that apply to telephone callers are used and adapted accordingly for staff who may receive a self-harm threat by people onsite.

The Ministry's reporting system cannot report on the number of clients who have threatened to commit suicide; however it can provide reporting on incidents in relation to threats to self-harm. The following table outlines the number of threats to self-harm that were reported between 1 January 2017 and 30 June 2018.

| Calendar year | Threats to self-harm |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2017 | 498 |
| First six months of 2018 | 248 |

2. *Figures for Work and Income staff who have been verbally and/or physically abused. Please break these figures down by what incidents were physical, what were verbal, what were both, and how many resulted in injury to staff.*

It is Ministry policy to record assault and abuse data that includes incidents involving members of the public, clients and Ministry staff. Therefore the Ministry's standard reporting is unable to isolate assaults specifically against staff. The table below outlines the number of physical assault and verbal abuse incidents that were reported between 1 January 2017 and 30 June 2018.

| Calendar year | Physical assault | Verbal abuse |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 2017 | 49 | 2492 |
| First six months of 2018 | 14 | 1145 |

3. *Figures of when police have been called to Work and Income offices to deal with irate or unhappy clients.*

The Ministry's reporting system cannot report on the number of times the Police have been called to Work and Income offices. The Ministry does however, record security incidents categorised as 'involving Police'. This means the Police have received notification of the security incident. It does not necessarily mean that Police attended onsite to the matter. Information on whether Police attended to the site after receiving notification of the incident is not recorded in the Ministry's reporting system. The table below outlines the number of times Police were notified of a security incident between 1 January 2017 and 30 June 2018.

| Calendar year | Police were notified |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2017 | 979 |
| First six months of 2018 | 393 |

4. *Figures for numbers of clients trespassed from Work and Income offices for aggressive behaviour.*

Clients exhibiting threatening behaviour will either be warned verbally or in writing. However, where warnings have been previously issued or in serious cases, such as assault or wilful damage to property, they may be served with a trespass notice.

Work and Income is committed to ensuring clients who have been trespassed from Work and Income sites continue to receive their correct entitlement to assistance. Once a trespass notice has been served, the client will be notified in writing and informed that they are no longer able to deal face-to-face with the Work and Income sites or region they are trespassed from. They are advised that in order to prevent a breach of the trespass notice, they should appoint an agent to act on their behalf when dealing with the Ministry.

Where no agent is willing to act on the person's behalf, or the person is not willing to have an agent, contact will be made by telephone or email. Work and Income will work with the client to put in place alternative arrangements.

Clients who have been trespassed and pose a high risk to the safety of Ministry staff may be referred to the Remote Client Unit. This unit provides specialist case management via phone, fax, email or mail. Where the person has no access to a telephone, contact will be made by letter.

The number of trespass notices issued by the Ministry between 1 January 2017 and 30 June 2018 is shown in the table below.

| Calendar year | Trespass notices issued |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2017 | 365 |
| First six months of 2018 | 154 |

5. Figures for Work and Income clients who have officially congratulated Work and Income for services.

The Ministry welcomes positive feedback from clients about the service they have received and the staff with whom they have interacted. This feedback comes through formal and informal channels and is always passed on to the relevant staff. However the Ministry does not centrally record this type of information. In order to provide this information, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to complete this task. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act, as substantial manual collation is required. 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 requests 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.

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 shortly. 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 regarding health safety and security incidents, 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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