



14 June 2023

Tēnā koe

On 19 May 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Copies of any reports, documents, minutes, briefing notes, memoranda, correspondence, legal advice, aide memoires, texts or emails, both internal and external mentioning Loafers Lodge dated between May 15 2018 and May 15 2023*

Building and fire safety is critical for everyone in rental accommodation, whether they are Ministry clients or not. That is why there is a well-established framework of regulation and requirements providing for fire safety in buildings, including for rental accommodation. Building regulations are the responsibility of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment at the national level. At the local level, local authorities are responsible for checking compliance and certifying buildings.

Legislation grants the Ministry no role in maintaining building regulatory compliance. The Ministry's responsibility is to assess people's eligibility for financial assistance, including Accommodation Supplement, which is not dependent on the compliance state of the building but rather the actual costs borne by the client.

The Ministry has identified correspondence from, and associated with, clients who listed their address as "Loafers Lodge" at any point during the period 15 May 2018 to 15 May 2023. There are emails regarding housing assistance for these clients from the Ministry that may be in scope of your request. However, the Ministry has withheld these under 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.

The above-mentioned information does not necessarily account for all clients residing at Loafers Lodge at some point over the past five years. Identifying any additional information mentioning Loafers Lodge in relation to all clients

who resided there during the specified period would require a review of a substantial number of individual client 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.

In the interest of being helpful, I am providing you with as much information as possible. Where I have decided to grant your request, I have done so by providing you with a summary of the relevant documents (section 16 of the Act refers). This has been done to ensure the privacy of Ministry clients remains protected, whilst also ensuring sufficient information is provided to address any transparency and accountability reasons favouring release of the information.

The Ministry received approximately 15 requests from various Media sources for information about whether Loafers Lodge was used as a supplier of Emergency Housing, fire safety standards, and other information. While the requests were received later than 15 May 2023 and are out of scope, I am providing a summary of the Ministry responses, as they explain the extent of the Ministry's involvement in Loafers Lodge.

The Media requests to the Ministry covered two broad areas: requests about whether Loafers Lodge was used as a supplier of Emergency Housing, to which the response was:

- The Loafers Lodge has never been a regular supplier of Emergency Housing.
- The property was more suited to long term boarding arrangements, but on rare occasions we provided an Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) for someone to stay there briefly.
- Based on the information we have to hand, over the past seven years there was approximately one Emergency Housing client at the Lodge each year. The last was in March 2023. The Ministry ceased using the lodge as there were other options available and the property was more suited to long term rental arrangements.

The second broad area the Ministry received Media requests concerned fire safety standards and the structural condition of the lodge. These were referred to the appropriate agency or Wellington City Council for response, as appropriate. The Ministry's response to these queries was:

- Our clients' safety is extremely important to us. We will continue to support the people affected by Tuesday's devastating fire.

- We expect the business owners who supply accommodation to our clients to meet all relevant standards imposed by regulatory authorities, including fire safety requirements.
- If someone staying in Emergency Housing contacts us with concerns about quality or safety, we follow up on this with the supplier.
- If these concerns cannot be quickly and mutually resolved, we work with the client to identify suitable alternative accommodation.
- Depending on the scope and severity of the issue, we may not use the supplier until it has been remedied.
- In December 2022 Cabinet approved the recommendations of the Emergency Housing System Review, led by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. Work is underway around accommodation standards and expanded support services for people in emergency housing. See information at this link:
www.beehive.govt.nz/release/emergency-housing-review-next-steps

In addition, please see the attached **Appendix** containing **Table One** that outlines the number of EH SNGs the Ministry made to Loafers Lodge during the period from 1 May 2019 to 30 April 2023.

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'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 about information held by the Ministry on Loafers Lodge, 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karen Hocking', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Karen Hocking
Group General Manager
Housing

APPENDIX

Table One: The number of Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants, to Loafers Lodge during the period from 1 May 2019 to 30 April 2023.

Quarter	Number of grants	Amount granted
December 2019	S	\$750.00
March 2020	S	\$760.00
September 2022	S	\$560.00
March 2023	S	\$1,400.00

Notes:

- This is the number of EH SNGs granted and not the number of clients.
- A client may have more than one grant during the reported period.
- This is the amount granted.
- The total amount granted may not be the same as the amount spent.

Confidentiality:

- To protect confidentiality the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data.
- In certain circumstances low numbers may potentially lead to individuals being identified.
- Due to these privacy concerns, numbers for some categories of clients have been suppressed or aggregated.
- Suppressed numbers have been replaced by an 'S'.