



30 AUG 2018

Dear [REDACTED]

On 3 August 2018, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *What is the current number of homeless people in Rotorua?*
- *Where does Rotorua rank nationally in the number of homeless people per capita?*
- *What work is the government doing currently to assist these people?*
- *What is the current number of people on the housing register in Rotorua?*

On 9 August 2018, the Ministry received a transfer of your request from Hon Phil Twyford, Minister of Housing and Urban Development. This response addresses both of your requests.

The Ministry is unable to provide you with the number of homeless people in Rotorua per capita as the Ministry does not hold this information. As such, your request for this information is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

The Ministry does, however, hold information on the number of people who have approached the Ministry for housing support. It is important to note that not every person who is without secure accommodation considers themselves homeless and not every person who is homeless seeks help from the Ministry.

As at 30 June 2018, there were 193 priority A and B applications on the Social Housing Register in the Rotorua Territorial Authority. Of those 193, 73 were recorded as living in insecure accommodation. Insecure housing is defined as accommodation such as a car/caravan/mobile home, emergency housing, temporarily sharing accommodation with other people, homeless, or temporary facility (eg hospital).

The housing type recorded for a public housing application is based on the responses provided by the main applicant. This may not reflect the situation of all household members included in the application. This includes priority A and B applications on both the Housing Register and the Transfer Register.

When a person approaches the Ministry for support because they are not in secure housing, the response and support provided will depend on their individual circumstances. A Case Manager will work with the individual to assess both their housing need and discuss their situation. This includes ensuring that they are receiving their full entitlement from Work and Income and, where relevant, working with the person to access other services such as approaching a General Practitioner to access mental health support.

The Ministry publishes a national report and regional fact sheets on a quarterly basis. This report contains more information that may be of interest to you, including the number of applications on the Social Housing Register. This information is available via the Ministry's website: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/index.html>.

You may be interested to know that the Ministry is leading work to improve the data available on the New Zealand homeless population. More regular, accurate data will help to better target responses to homelessness and the development of approaches preventing homelessness from occurring.

A Literature review of international research about the collection of data on homeless populations was recently completed and will be published in October 2018. The review will help with the different estimates and counts to be developed over the next two years. One of these is a regular count of the 'without shelter' category of the homeless population, which includes those sleeping rough or in cars. These counts can be done for example, as a point in time exercise or as an on-going register. The different types each have particular strengths and limitations. Over the next year the Ministry will be mounting extensive stakeholder consultation and analysis to test potential count designs to establish a recommended approach.

The Ministry has also entered into an agreement with the University of Otago to produce an official estimate of the full homeless population based on New Zealand Census data. The estimate is expected to be available in mid-2019, with the exact date to be confirmed once Statistics New Zealand makes recommendations to the Government on official statistics' categories.

Examples of the types of assistance and services available to help people with their housing needs are outlined below:

Housing First - Housing First is an internationally-recognised approach to addressing chronic homelessness. The Housing First model recognises that it is easier for people to address issues such as mental health and substance use, once they are housed. It provides stable housing to people experiencing homelessness, before providing them with access to the support services they need to address issues underpinning their homelessness. As at 30 June 2018, 288 households have been placed into secure and stable accommodation in Auckland, Tauranga, Christchurch, and Wellington.

The Housing First programme is expanding with 550 new places in Rotorua, Whangarei/Northland, Nelson/Marlborough and the Napier/Hastings area. The number of Housing First places in each region will be determined over the next few months as we work with providers and stakeholders in each region. The new Housing First programmes are expected to begin in late 2018, or in 2019 at the latest. Additional information regarding Housing First is available on the Ministry's website here:

www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/social-housing/housing-first.html

Transitional Housing - Transitional housing offers warm, dry and safe short-term accommodation for those people and families who have no place of their own, generally for up to 12 weeks, or more if necessary while more permanent housing options are sourced. Tenants also receive tailored social support from providers during their stay. There were 2,341 transitional housing places secured for tenancing as at 30 June 2018, and 64 of those places are in Rotorua. More information regarding transitional housing is available on the Ministry's website here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/social-housing/transitional-or-emergency-housing.html

Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (SNG) - The purpose of the Emergency Housing SNG is to help individuals and families with the cost of staying in short-term commercial accommodation such as a motel, if they are temporarily unable to access one of the Ministry's contracted transitional housing places.

Emergency Housing SNGs are not intended as a long-term housing solution, however it is a necessary solution while more sustainable options are progressed. The important thing is that New Zealanders have a warm, safe and dry place to live. Additional information regarding Emergency Housing SNGs is available on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-housing.html

Accommodation Supplement (AS) - AS is a weekly payment provided to assist people who are not in public housing, with their rent, board, or the cost of owning a home. A person does not have to be receiving a benefit to qualify for the supplement. Further information regarding AS is accessible on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/

Temporary Additional Support (TAS) - TAS is a weekly payment that helps cover essential living costs that cannot be met from a person's income and through other resources. It is paid for a maximum of 13 weeks, and the recipient does not have to be receiving a benefit to qualify for it. Additional information regarding TAS is available on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/temporary-additional-support/

Appointment of Agent - There may be times when a person may want help in their dealings with the Ministry. In these situations the Ministry recommends that they consider appointing an agent or organisation to act on their behalf. The Ministry can also connect people with local community advocacy groups. Information about the appointment of agent process can be found on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/our-services/appointment-of-agent.html

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 concerning homelessness in Rotorua, 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Scott Gallacher', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Scott Gallacher
Deputy Chief Executive, Housing