



28 SEP 2020

Tēnā koe

On 31 August 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), ten questions about emergency housing on the West Coast.

Contextual information regarding emergency housing and Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants (EH SNGs) was provided to you in my response from 24 August 2020.

For clarity, your questions are answered in turn.

- 1. What agencies does MSD work with, and on behalf of, when relocating clients in housing need to the West Coast*

When assessing a client's eligibility to receive an EH SNG the Ministry works with them to find a suitable place to stay in the area they prefer. The Ministry does not relocate clients unless an absence of emergency accommodation in a particular location makes it necessary to do so in order to meet that need.

However, the nature of a relocation is entirely dependent on the client. Like all New Zealanders, Ministry clients make their own choices about where they wish to reside. If a client chooses to relocate to a different region, the Ministry will try to assist in this move. The nature of a relocation is entirely dependent on the client.

Furthermore, as the Ministry does not work with agencies to relocate clients, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information you requested does not exist.

- 2. What are the main regions and cities the majority of MSD clients seeking emergency accommodation in Greymouth or Westport come from?*

Ministry case managers try to place clients in the same region that the visited Service Centre is located. Therefore, most clients would be recorded to have come from Westport or Greymouth. Determining if a client was granted an EH SNG for the West Coast region when they were residing outside the region would require substantial manual collation, as this would be recorded in the notes in their client file.

In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, this part your request is refused 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.

3. *Do clients relocated to the West Coast voluntarily choose to be housed on the Coast, or is it an option presented to them?*
4. *Is the West Coast promoted by MSD or other agencies as a suitable place to relocate to, and if so why?*
5. *Is the West Coast seen by agencies and MSD as a suitable location to house those seeking emergency accommodation because of its perceived low population and relatively low cost of housing - please explain?*

The Ministry attempts to meet a client's immediate need for accommodation. The Ministry would only suggest a client relocate from the region that their EH SNG was granted in if there is either no emergency housing available in their place of residence, or for the health and safety of the individual.

The Ministry does not promote movements between regions, however, as noted in my response to Question One, if a client independently chooses to move, the Ministry will assist where possible.

6. *In what ways is the impact on an existing community's social fabric considered and measured by MSD, and other agencies, when decisions are made to move clients into West Coast communities. Is it considered at all?*

The Ministry's primary focus when granting an EH SNG is the wellbeing of the client. The Ministry assesses each client on a case-by-case basis. When supporting a client to relocate, Ministry staff consider a range of factors including the availability of long-term employment, as well as housing options and support services in that location which meets the client's needs. However, as previously stated, it is ultimately the client that decides where they want to live.

7. *Who are the social service providers on the West Coast supporting those living in emergency accommodation to ensure any issues with clients or their accommodation are addressed quickly?*

The Ministry contracts with Whakatū Marae for the provision of housing navigation services and with the Methodist Mission for housing support services in the Nelson and West Coast region.

8. *What percentage of clients moved to the West Coast are through Work and Income's emergency housing programme and Correction's Out the Gate programme - or other association programmes. (please name any associated programmes and approximate numbers)?*

As mentioned above, Ministry clients choose where they wish to live. The Ministry does not proactively relocate people for emergency housing. Furthermore, the

Ministry does not hold data that would show whether a client living in emergency housing was also participating in Corrections' Out of Gate programme or any other associated programmes.

As such, you were advised via email on 14 September 2020 that, in line with Section 14 of the Act, the Ministry partially transferred your request to the Department of Corrections for a response.

All information about other associated programmes is refused under section 18(g) of the 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.

9. What percentage of clients moved into emergency housing accommodation on the West Coast, from areas outside the West Coast have criminal convictions?

As mentioned above, Ministry clients choose where they wish to live. The Ministry does not proactively relocate people for emergency housing.

The Ministry does not necessarily hold information about clients' criminal histories. If held, this information would be noted on individual client files, and/or held in relation to a Steps to Freedom Grant. This Grant is available to clients who have been released from prison or are no longer being held on remand. The grant is meant to help clients with their initial set up of living costs. More information about this grant is located on Work and Income's website at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/lost-job/prison.html#null.

Furthermore, and as also mentioned above, determining if a client was granted an EH SNG for the West Coast region when they were residing outside the region would require substantial manual collation, as this would be recorded in the notes in their client file. Determining whether any of these clients have criminal convictions would therefore also require substantial manual collation, if the information was held at all.

As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as it requires substantial collation. 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 either of 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.

10. What percentage of clients have a family violence or drug use/addiction background considered significant enough to be a driver for relocation and emergency housing?

The Ministry would only hold information about family violence or substance abuse if a Ministry staff member referred the client to an alcohol or drug service or helpline. This information would be managed with the client and recorded in a client's individual file. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse your request under section

18(f) of the Act, as it requires substantial collation. 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 this request if 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.

Additionally, if the client has sought help outside of the Ministry, the Ministry would not hold this information. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the 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 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. 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 emergency housing on the West Coast, 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



Karen Hocking
General Manager, Housing