



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

26 November 2021

Dear

On 29 October 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *All information held by the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) relating to the number of emergency and transitional housing occupants, currently residing in Rotorua, and the location of occupants' residence immediately prior to placement in emergency and/or transitional housing. In particular, we are seeking the following items of information within the parameters of our request above:*
 1. *the number of emergency housing occupants who resided in a suburb in Rotorua immediately before their placement in emergency housing;*
 2. *the number of emergency housing occupants who resided in a suburb outside of Rotorua immediately before their placement in emergency housing, including identification of the suburb that each occupant previously resided in;*
 3. *any policy statement or policy advice of the Ministry, Kainga Ora, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, or the Rotorua Lakes Council (the Council) which indicates that persons residing outside Rotorua on the housing register can, or should, be placed in emergency and/or transitional housing in Rotorua; and*
 4. *any communications between the Ministry, Kainga Ora, the Council, and/or the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development which indicates that persons residing outside Rotorua on the housing register can, or should, be placed in emergency and/or transitional housing in Rotorua.*

We have been advised that you have made a similar request to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Kāinga Ora (KO). On 3 November, HUD and KO transferred the matching parts of these requests to the Ministry. This applies to part one, two, five, and six of your request to HUD, and to part three and four of your request to KO.

Please find the Ministry's response to each part of your request below. Related questions have been grouped together.

1. *the number of emergency housing occupants who resided in a suburb in Rotorua immediately before their placement in emergency housing;*
2. *the number of emergency housing occupants who resided in a suburb outside of Rotorua immediately before their placement in emergency housing, including identification of the suburb that each occupant previously resided in;*

The Ministry acknowledges that there is a shortage of housing throughout the country. The increased demand for emergency housing in Rotorua is a symptom of an ongoing shortage of affordable housing in the region, and New Zealand in general. Rotorua is recognised as one of nine key areas of severe housing deprivation under the Public Housing Plan initiative, announced in January 2021 with the goal of increasing housing supply in areas of greatest need. More information on the Public Housing Plan can be found here: <https://www.hud.govt.nz/community-and-public-housing/increasing-public-housing/public-housing-plan/>

The vast majority of households supported by the Ministry with emergency housing in Rotorua district are local. The Ministry carried out a point in time survey in September 2020, following concerns expressed locally that a large number of people were coming from outside Rotorua and being housed locally. This survey was not of all clients but an indicative sample. That survey showed the majority of people being supported with Emergency Housing were from Rotorua.

The Ministry carried out another survey in mid-March 2021 which confirmed the earlier review. This most recent survey again took a sample of clients accommodated in emergency housing in the Rotorua district, who had come to the Ministry for assistance with their emergency housing needs. Of the clients sampled 87 per cent were from Rotorua or the wider Bay of Plenty.

The leading reason for those who are relocating to Rotorua from outside the region was to be close to whānau and whānau supports. This includes people moving to be close to their children, and those moving to the region to be close to whānau support due to terminal illness or escaping family violence.

It is important to note that both surveys were conducted from a sample of those in emergency housing in the district and not official data centrally collated.

The Ministry is unable to provide you with official centrally collated data. Many applicants for emergency housing no longer have a place of residence at the time of their application. Therefore, the Ministry does not hold previous address data. With regard to these clients, your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as the information is not held by the Ministry and the Ministry has no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

For the remaining group of clients that apply for emergency housing, the Ministry may hold address data, however, this data is not centrally held and cannot be collated through an automated electronic search. It is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, this aspect of 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.

The Ministry has considered whether it would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. The Ministry has concluded that, in either case, its ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

3. *any policy statement or policy advice of the Ministry, Kainga Ora, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, or the Rotorua Lakes Council (the Council) which indicates that persons residing outside Rotorua on the housing register*

*can, or should, be placed in emergency and/or transitional housing in Rotorua;
and*

4. *any communications between the Ministry, Kainga Ora, the Council, and/or the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development which indicates that persons residing outside Rotorua on the housing register can, or should, be placed in emergency and/or transitional housing in Rotorua.*

The Ministry does not encourage clients to move to Rotorua or any other location in order to receive accommodation there. However, the Ministry's emergency housing policy and operational policy does not preclude people from outside a specific location (in this case Rotorua) seeking Public or Emergency Housing in a certain place. There may be certain circumstances in which the Ministry would grant a client from outside Rotorua emergency housing in the city. For example, if a client living in Taupo needed to leave their usual accommodation and had whānau support in Rotorua, the Ministry may consider granting emergency housing there by request of the applicant, and vice versa. The key considerations would be the best interests of the client, whether there is a legitimate need to move, and whether emergency housing is available. The same rationale applies to clients who are on the Housing Register.

The Ministry's relevant Housing and Policy teams have searched through their records and can find no evidence of a policy statement or advice that specifically addresses your request in respect of Rotorua. Therefore, the third part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as the information does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

With regard to the fourth part of your request, the relevant business units at the Ministry's National Office have looked through records of correspondence and can see no communications that fall within scope of the request. Correspondence on specific cases would likely be held by the Ministry's regional offices and service centres. However, this correspondence would not be flagged or stored as correspondence relating to the subject of your request. Therefore, Ministry staff in regional offices and service centres have no means to collate it in an efficient manner. Hundreds of staff members would be required to manually search their email inboxes, which may include hundreds or thousands of emails per each staff member.

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, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as it requires substantial manual collation. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

The Ministry has considered whether it would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. The Ministry has concluded that, in either case, its ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

The principles and purposes of the Act 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
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

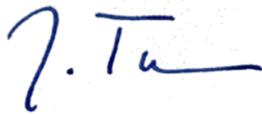
This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to

the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry 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 or the Ministry's Housing team directly at Housing_Team_ServiceDelivery@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, 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

pp. 

Karen Hocking
General Manager
Housing