



2 March 2026

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 23 January 2026, requesting information from the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) about Work and Income general line.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

- *Any policies, procedures, internal guidelines, or operational instructions governing:*
 - *call queue limits,*
 - *automated call termination,*
 - *and decisions to disconnect callers rather than allow them to wait or request a callback.*

Your request for this information is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as this document does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

- *Statistical data showing:*
 - *the number of calls to WINZ telephone lines that were automatically terminated by the system after advising callers to "try later",*
 - *average and peak wait times,*
 - *call abandonment rates (including system-initiated termination, not only caller hang-ups).*

Please refer to the attached **Appendix A** which provides the number of calls offered, answered, abandoned, average speed to answer and maximum (max) time to answer in the period January 2021 – December 2025.

Please note, the Ministry does not track the number of calls that cannot go through our 0800-line queue. As such, I am refusing your request for information on system-initiated termination, under section 18(g) of the Act. The information you

1. Awaiting data from Mike McCawe

have requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

- *Any internal reports, briefings, emails, or memoranda that:*
 - *acknowledge persistent phone access problems,*
 - *identify risks or harm caused to clients by lack of telephone access,*
 - *or discuss mitigation strategies (including callback systems).*

I have identified one document related to the above part of your request titled 'Detailed Business Requirements – CallMe Project'. This document contains information largely outside the scope of your request. In accordance with section 16(1)(e), I am providing you with the excerpts relevant to your request in the attached **Appendix B**.

Please note, this document was drafted in 2019 to detail requirements of the Call Back project. As such, costings were not included at the time of drafting.

I have also provided you with some general information on the system's the Ministry currently has in place to address volumes, as below.

The Ministry has several systems in place to help manage our contact with clients as efficiently as possible. In particular, we provide callers with an estimated wait time so they can choose to either wait in the queue or call back during off peak hours.

We also have "CallMe"- a call back system where clients can request a call back without losing their place in the queue. To be offered a callback, wait times need to be greater than 7 minutes, and callers need to be phoning from a disclosed number (ie: not withheld/private). Although the time to receive a callback may be long, it does mean that callers can hold their place in the queue without being physically tied to their phones. We attempt to make two callback calls and, if someone misses both and they called from a cellphone, our system will send a text message advising that they can call back, and we'll hold their place in the queue (ie: prioritise their call).

Clients also have the option of providing their preferred communication method within their client profile and are also able to ask for their accessibility needs to be listed as part of a 'Special Caution' on their notes.

Additionally, a client with accessibility issues can ask for a dedicated case manager at Work and Income and then indicate to that staff member that they have a preferred form of communication. Where possible, these requirements are met by Work and Income.

The Ministry is aware that some disabled clients are unable to use our call system as the primary mode of communication for reasons related to their disability. The Ministry offers the use of the Deaf Services line for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, have a speech impairment or find using a phone difficult. This offers clients the use of text and email as the primary channels, and this team act as liaison between the client and the relevant Work and Income staff member. www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/contact-us/deaf-hard-of-hearing-or-have-a-speech-impairment.html.

The Ministry also offers the use of NZ Relay for clients who require phone-based New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) interpreting. In face to face or online meetings, we offer the use of an NZSL interpreter, in person or online.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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 my decision on your request, 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

pp.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Graham', written in a cursive style.

Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services



Appendix A

The number of calls offered, answered, abandoned, average speed to answer and max time to answer in the period January 2021 – December 2025.

Business Unit	Month	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Abandoned	ASA	Abandoned %	Max Time to Answer (secs)
Work and Income	2025-01	299,101	245,593	53,508	09:50	17.9%	6819
	2025-02	267,900	220,547	47,353	09:57	17.7%	6994
	2025-03	323,304	267,182	56,122	08:25	17.4%	6356
	2025-04	306,827	253,897	52,930	07:42	17.3%	6667
	2025-05	358,465	299,651	58,814	07:09	16.4%	6062
	2025-06	315,797	267,047	48,750	06:24	15.4%	6403
	2025-07	348,742	293,675	55,067	07:01	15.8%	6889
	2025-08	354,198	296,277	57,921	06:49	16.4%	6339
	2025-09	362,520	304,968	57,552	06:37	15.9%	6403
	2025-10	340,884	286,795	54,089	07:20	15.9%	7032
	2025-11	309,418	259,254	50,164	07:57	16.2%	6893
	2025-12	298,713	252,739	45,974	07:55	15.4%	7657
Work and Income Total		3,885,869	3,247,625	638,244	07:40	16.4%	7657
Business Unit	Month	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Abandoned	ASA	Abandoned %	Max Time to Answer (secs)

1. Awaiting data from Mike McCawe

2. Across all MSD phone lines for 6 months F.Y. 2017-18 to date as at 30 January 2019

The Aurora Centre, 56 The Terrace, PO Box 1556, Wellington

– Telephone 04-916 3300 – Facsimile 04-918 0099

Work and Income	2024-01	289,730	239,032	50,698	10:38	17.5%	8280
	2024-02	280,488	232,650	47,838	09:55	17.1%	7233
	2024-03	311,328	262,128	49,200	07:36	15.8%	6289
	2024-04	324,381	273,532	50,849	07:07	15.7%	5773
	2024-05	369,000	306,722	62,278	06:48	16.9%	6518
	2024-06	302,422	255,165	47,257	06:19	15.6%	6055
	2024-07	354,869	293,705	61,164	07:44	17.2%	7344
	2024-08	357,609	296,826	60,783	07:25	17.0%	6491
	2024-09	348,184	297,094	51,090	06:09	14.7%	4996
	2024-10	359,781	297,531	62,250	07:22	17.3%	7297
	2024-11	343,867	283,635	60,232	07:52	17.5%	6951
	2024-12	302,023	250,576	51,447	08:08	17.0%	7657
Work and Income Total		3,943,682	3,288,596	655,086	07:41	16.6%	8280
Business Unit	Month	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Abandoned	ASA	Abandoned %	Max Time to Answer (secs)
Work and Income	2023-01	339,801	234,655	105,146	24:03	30.9%	10799
	2023-02	429,873	312,026	117,847	18:15	27.4%	10012
	2023-03	332,551	258,690	73,861	13:40	22.2%	9619
	2023-04	256,327	199,186	57,141	13:30	22.3%	7149
	2023-05	321,734	255,973	65,761	11:07	20.4%	7830
	2023-06	284,189	225,530	58,659	11:13	20.6%	7625
	2023-07	266,793	212,330	54,463	12:13	20.4%	8850
	2023-08	295,831	237,514	58,317	11:19	19.7%	11703
	2023-09	295,714	220,615	75,099	13:56	25.4%	7117
	2023-10	275,657	218,054	57,603	11:31	20.9%	7765
	2023-11	261,153	212,070	49,083	11:55	18.8%	7842
	2023-12	249,358	205,549	43,809	10:47	17.6%	7011

Work and Income Total		3,608,981	2,792,192	816,789	13:48	22.6%	11703
Business Unit	Month	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Abandoned	ASA	Abandoned %	Max Time to Answer (secs)
Work and Income	2022-01	432,080	266,532	165,548	36:36	38.3%	9027
	2022-02	393,095	237,566	155,529	41:16	39.6%	11038
	2022-03	388,281	244,784	143,497	34:14	37.0%	13460
	2022-04	352,775	244,159	108,616	22:40	30.8%	10726
	2022-05	436,263	287,331	148,932	24:00	34.1%	8445
	2022-06	383,650	236,410	147,240	29:43	38.4%	9274
	2022-07	402,092	242,319	159,773	31:12	39.7%	10071
	2022-08	429,818	278,424	151,394	24:25	35.2%	6937
	2022-09	380,695	257,435	123,260	20:43	32.4%	6588
	2022-10	357,293	217,789	139,504	30:03	39.0%	10153
	2022-11	375,279	225,841	149,438	30:47	39.8%	9632
	2022-12	313,759	215,329	98,430	22:16	31.4%	9233
Work and Income Total		4,645,080	2,953,919	1,691,161	28:54	36.4%	13460
Business Unit	Month	Calls Offered	Calls Answered	Calls Abandoned	ASA	Abandoned %	Max Time to Answer (secs)
Work and Income	2021-01	462,673	351,035	111,638	16:31	24.1%	8833
	2021-02	457,309	333,244	124,065	19:35	27.1%	6990
	2021-03	513,428	401,341	112,087	13:42	21.8%	9010
	2021-04	425,297	328,001	97,296	14:37	22.9%	6243
	2021-05	469,025	369,137	99,888	12:37	21.3%	6830
	2021-06	444,155	342,831	101,324	13:30	22.8%	5686
	2021-07	445,376	351,112	94,264	12:06	21.2%	8590

	2021-08	456,714	389,789	66,925	07:49	14.7%	6105
	2021-09	396,235	341,292	54,943	06:55	13.9%	7920
	2021-10	419,943	314,706	105,237	15:41	25.1%	8955
	2021-11	483,406	327,559	155,847	23:36	32.2%	8813
	2021-12	427,033	298,940	128,093	22:28	30.0%	9010
Work and Income Total		5,400,594	4,148,987	1,251,607	14:41	23.2%	9010

*ASA – Average speed to answer



Appendix B – Excerpts under section 16(1)(e)

3 Project Background

The Ministry has been considering call backs for MSD’s contact centres on and off since 2010. Over the years, many clients have asked for this system (in complaints, ministerials and over the phone) as they feel it would give them more transparency about the queue which allows them to make decisions. More recently the Heartbeat survey data has included numerous requests from clients for a call back system. A call back system will improve client satisfaction with our services.

Costs to implement call back technology have improved considerably during this period and we now have an opportunity to build our own call back system based on a call back solution recently built for Oranga Tamariki by MSD’s Voice Platform Services.

In the year ending June 2018, the Service Delivery contact centres spent \$x.xx¹ million in telephony costs – this includes the cost of inbound and outbound calls between CSRs and agents, but also, significantly, the cost of clients waiting in queue before being answered by a CSR – this cost is estimated at \$xx0,000 per annum.

There is increasing pressure on our workforce to meet call demand resulting in clients waiting longer in the queue to speak to us. Most recently this is a direct result of the implementation of phone based appointments, the implementation of Full Assist queues where CSRs can grant a wide range of hardship payments thus moving this work from service centres to and seasonal hardship payments for school uniforms now managed in the contact centre. These changes have pushed demand higher and this will continue as more service centres migrate this work to the contact centre.

At present clients are waiting on average 4:50², up 29.4% or a minute and a quarter from 3:25 for F.Y. 2017-18. This does not support our priority to deliver better service and clients waiting in the queue are also adding to our telephony costs.

Complementing the steps that have been taken to try and reduce this pressure, including reviewing staffing levels, roster distribution, and increasing call efficiency, it has been identified that investment in Call Back technology will improve our service to clients.

4 Principles

The following principles apply to the design of the CallMe solution.

- Use a conversational/natural flowing dialogue that fits the caller's context.

1. Awaiting data from **Out of scope**

- Keep callers engaged by ensuring they're invested in the outcome. Subtly explain to the caller why something is being asked.
- Keep the caller moving. Even when additional questions are required make sure that the caller understands the relevance of the question to their enquiry
- Don't make the experience in VET longer than it is now.
- Minimise the amount of Operations Analyst manual intervention/monitoring/configuration that we need to do each day.
- Make it as simple and attractive as humanly possible for clients to take up.
- Think carefully about who and when we offer callbacks to.
- Think about this as a feature that adds value to the experience, not a feature that covers up high wait times.
- Never make the caller feel as if they have done something wrong or that they are responsible for things not working, e.g. "You entered an invalid number." It is better for the system to accept blame and move on.
- Make as much of the CallMe system as possible controllable by the Operations Analyst team unless it requires an interface with MSD middleware to provide personalised information.

Scope

At this stage, the Call Back project is split up into two phases. Phase one will focus on:

- Implementation of basic features
- Trialling call back functionality in the Seniors contact centre
- Implementing call back functionality into all appropriate queues
- Operations Analysts managing the process
- Reviewing client and staff feedback.

Phase two will focus on

- Enhancing the management of the call back process based on the first phase
- Taking into account client and staff feedback.
- Identifying and making enhancements.