

28 January 2020

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Dear Peter Nielson

I refer to your email of 9 December 2019 in which you request a range of information under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) as set out and answered below:

Please also see attached the Ministry document setting out the requirements for "Visitors Staying in Diplomatic Residential Accommodation" and two forms identifying the responsibilities of the tenant of leased or owned properties.

- 1. I wish to know MFAT's policy regarding staff who reside in an MFAT owned or rented residence due to their position (for example the residence of New Zealand's ambassador to South Korea or the residence of the New Zealand consul general in Hong Kong).*

All staff posted offshore are provided with accommodation for themselves and accompanying recognised partners and dependents. The Head of Mission (HOM) or Head of Post (HOP) and their family occupy the Official Residence during their posting. Other staff will be provided with owned or leased accommodation on the following basis:

- The Ministry has an approved set of housing standards based on floor area, family composition, rank, an appropriate modest standard and cost (based on a competitive market rental). These standards are used to select leased accommodation for staff overseas.
- For Ministry owned or long-term leased staff accommodation, family size, floor size or other criteria may not always be applicable, for example, there may be an available property that has four bedrooms and the staff member arriving at Post may be single.

- 2. Specifically - are adult children or step children (over 25) of MFAT staff who live in an MFAT owned or funded residence permitted to live in that residence also?*

Dependent children of staff and/or their partner on a posting are permitted to live in MFAT owned or leased accommodation. Dependent children are recognised up to the age of 21, with the exception of children who have special needs who are still considered to be a recognised dependent including once they are over the age of 21.

3. *Are there any limits on how long adult children may live in an MFAT owned or rented residence inhabited by an MFAT staff member?*

Prior approval from the HOM/HOP would be required for stays longer than four weeks. Dependent children may live in Ministry owned or leased accommodation for the duration of the staff member's posting, or until the completion of certain secondary school exams if the staff member's posting ends prior to the conclusion of these exams.

4. *Are adult children of MFAT staff living in a MFAT owned or rented residence required to contribute to the costs of the residence (by paying rent and expenses?)*

No. Dependent children living in Ministry owned or leased accommodation, are not required to contribute to the costs of the accommodation. The staff member is required to provide a contribution toward the cost of their housing and utilities. The contribution level is set based on family composition, taking into account any accompanying partner and any dependent children living with the staff member at the post.

Staff are expected to ensure there is a contribution towards any additional costs incurred as a result of having a visitor staying with them in MFAT owned or leased accommodation, which primarily relates to the use and cost of utility services. This is set out in the attached policy. Staff are not permitted to sublet their accommodation.

5. *How many adult children of MFAT staff currently reside in an MFAT owned or rented residence?*

There are currently eight dependent children over the age of 18 and under the age of 21, and one dependent child over the age of 21, residing in Ministry owned or leased accommodation.

6. *What is the estimated cost to MFAT to host adult children in MFAT residences per year?*

The estimated cost would predominantly be the level of any contribution made by the staff member to reimburse the Ministry for the cost of utilities used during the visit, by non-dependent children or step children. The Ministry does not collect information on visitors hosted by staff on a posting, and this includes the numbers of non-dependent children or step children of the staff member who have visited the post. As such, we are unable to provide this information to you and this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the OIA, that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

7. *Are official cars or MFAT supplied taxi chits or paid cab or shuttle expenses used to transport adult children of MFAT staff on any occasion? If so, what is the total expenditure?*

No.

8. *What type of agreements or rules does MFAT have for its staff governing the use of residences? I request copies of any policy documents on this.*

Staff sign a document with the Ministry that sets out their responsibilities as a tenant of Ministry leased or owned properties. The standards and processes for staff accommodation are reflected in these responsibilities. Copies of these documents are attached.

9. *Has MFAT formally or informally investigated inappropriate usage of residences over the past five years? What was the outcome of any investigation?*

The Ministry has formally or informally investigated five situations of inappropriate usage of Ministry owned or leased accommodation over the past five years. The outcomes were that the situation was addressed to ensure the inappropriate usage did not continue and the staff member either: received counselling services, received support, was disciplined, received a reminder about inappropriate behaviour, or resigned.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details redacted) and enclosed documents may be published on the Ministry's website.

You have the right under section 28(3) of the OIA to seek a review of this response by the Ombudsman.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'W' followed by a long horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Wendy Adams
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade