



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Dale Smith
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18 FEB 2021

Dear Dale Smith

On 9 December 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *The process that decides whether an individual employed under the definition of a "client-facing role" will immediately action papers handed to them, or whether this is given to a processor to complete*
- *Information held on applications that are expected by the Ministry to be completed at the time of meeting with the client (e.g. Disability Allowance review, Special Needs Grant application) and applications that are expected to go to a processor*
- *Any plans the department have to allow for all applications, if complete, to be processed within 24 hours*

On 8 January 2021, the Ministry contacted you in order to refine the scope of your request. This was because the Ministry was unable to make a determination on what was meant specifically by a 'client facing role', and, as the Ministry offers a large number of types of benefit assistance, which applications were of interest to you. The Ministry advised that as the request stood, providing a response would constitute as substantial collation and research, and would likely be refused under section 18(f) of the Act.

On 12 January 2021, you responded to the Ministry's correspondence and advised the following:

- *By 'client-facing role' I mean specifically roles that were classified as such under the Client-Facing Role Review undertaken over the 2019 period, namely Case Managers, Customer Service Representatives and any subsidiary of these roles such as an Integrated Services Case Manager but not inclusive of roles such as Work Brokers or Programme Coordinators (as they were left out of the CFRR and given a subsequent role review later in time)*
- *I am interested in all types of applications for which there is a paper form that also relates in a financial claim (so Disability Allowance, Accommodation Supplement would be, but Redirection of Benefit Payment or Appointment of Agent applications would not be included), except for Main Benefit applications (Jobseeker Support, Sole Parent Support and Supported Living Payment)*

Page 1 of 3

The Ministry receives a variety of different applications (including but not limited to those for main benefits, supplementary assistance, employment assistance etc.) which are received and processed in a variety of different ways. The timeframe to process applications can therefore depend on a number of factors, such as how and when the application was received, what the application is for, and if there are any urgent considerations that need to be made in terms of the client's needs.

The Ministry has a general guidance timeframe of five-working days for the processing of an application. This is based on the Ministry's annual performance measures, which can be found online as part of the Vote Social Development estimates. This information is available on the Treasury website at the following link: www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/estimates/vote-social-development-social-services-and-community-sector-estimates-2020-21.

Please note that this timeframe only applies to a complete application. An application for a benefit or assistance from the Ministry is generally considered complete when the appropriate application form and any supporting evidence required is received by the Ministry, and when any pre-benefit activities have been completed. The application form and any supporting evidence required must be received within 20 working days of the client's date of first contact. Further information about applications can be found online at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/core-policy/requests-for-financial-assistance/application-for-benefit/guidelines-application-for-benefit.html.

As the process for each type of application and the circumstances surrounding their receipt differs, the Ministry does not have a one size fits all approach. It is an expectation that staff members will process applications as soon as they possibly can, and within the guidance timeframe of five-working days. However, the Ministry is aware that this is not always possible.

As such, your request for information on the process which decides when applications received by staff in client facing roles are actioned and, for information held on applications that are expected to be completed at the time of meeting with the client is refused in full under section 18(g)(i) 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.

There are many factors that can affect the processing of documents and applications, this can include the type of application, the way the application is received and the location of receipt. For example, different Service Centres may have different measures in place to process applications in order to meet the unique needs of that Service Centre and its clients. A larger Service Centre is likely to have different requirements than a smaller and quieter one.

If a client is meeting with a member of staff face-to-face and is submitting documents for an application, it is expected that the application will be inputted at that same time, or later that same day if all information has been provided. Paperwork can be also be completed and processing can begin as part of an interview process between a Case Manager and a client.

The Ministry has a focus on providing first contact resolution, but there are instances where we do not have the capacity to do this. An example of this would be when a Case Manager is in training. The Ministry is committed to building capability across our workforce, and this work is ongoing.

The Ministry does not currently have any plans to process all applications, if complete, within 24 hours. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information requested does not exist.

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 relating to processing times for benefit applications, 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

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Bridget Saunders
**Manager, Issues Resolution
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