

Hon Jan Tinetti

Minister of Internal Affairs
Minister for Women
Associate Minister of Education



21 NOV 2022

John
fyi-request-20939-6cb29788@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe John

Thank you for your email of 21 October 2022, requesting under the Official Information Act 1982 (Act):

In a recent response to me, the you have replied when asked about the issues at the Citizenship Office and I quote “As Minister, it is not appropriate for me to get involved in operational matters such as this.”

- If the Minister does not get involved in operational matters, how does she guarantee the good performance of the department under her portfolio?
- Who is accountable to the delays in the Citizenship office in regards to delays and huge timeframes in processing Citizenship by Grant applications?
- What did the Minister do (and/or has been doing) to solve the issue of delays and extensive timeframes in processing Citizenship by Grant applications? Please provide copies of any communications.

In response to your request, I can provide you with the following information.

It is first important for me to explain that Ministers decide both the direction of and the priorities for their departments. They are generally not involved in their departments' day-to-day operations, as this is the responsibility of the department. In general terms, Ministers are responsible for determining and promoting policy, defending policy decisions, and answering in the House on both policy and operational matters.

As Minister I receive regular reports on the performance of the Department. I have been receiving such reports regularly to monitor the Department's efforts in reducing backlogs in products and note that the Department has reduced the citizenship by grant backlog by over a third in the past seven months and has been consistently processing more applications than are being received.

As you are already aware, a backlog of applications for citizenship by grant arose as the Department transitioned from an old paper-based application system to a fully online one. COVID-19 restrictions and reduced staffing capacity exacerbated to the backlog which peaked in March 2022.

The Department reviewed its operational processes and practices because of this, allowing it to better utilise the capabilities of the new system. This new system for processing applications enables a series of automated checks to be run across all applications to triage these into separate queues based on the amount of manual intervention required.

It's important to highlight that as a result of this, 47% of citizenship by grant applications are now processed in under 10 weeks. I expect the Department to continue to reduce disparities in processing times and to see a further reduction in processing times over the coming months.

As I have previously explained, I receive regular reports from the Department detailing its progress in managing the citizenship by grant backlog. As such, there are no communications relating to this part of your request. Therefore, I refuse this part of your request under section 18(e) of the Act; the information requested does not exist.

You have the right, under section 28(3) of the Act, to seek an investigation and review of this decision by the Office of the Ombudsman. The postal address of the Office of the Ombudsman is PO Box 10152, Wellington. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 802 602 or email info@ombudsman.parliament.nz.

I trust this information has been of assistance and thank you again for writing.

Ngā mihi

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

Hon Jan Tinetti
Minister of Internal Affairs