



30 MAR 2017

Rex Landy

fyi-request-5480-be7f3057@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Landy

On 2 March 2017 your request for the following information, under the Official Information Act 1982, was transferred to the Ministry of Social Development:

- *The amount of money that has been spent on 'temporary' accommodation in NZ by housing people in motels, broken down by year from 2010 to date.*
- *How many houses could have been built with that sum.*

You will appreciate the complexities of emergency housing, particularly as places are limited or already at capacity, and the demand for affordable social housing is high. The Ministry must consider other housing options for people who require assistance and, in some cases, motels or hotels may be the only viable option available at the time that meets the immediate need of a person's or a family's circumstances.

As of 1 July 2016, the emergency housing Special Needs Grant (SNG) was made available to people who for various reasons, cannot remain in their usual place of residence, if any, and will not have access to other accommodation which is adequate for their or their family's needs. Through the use of emergency housing SNGs, the Ministry has assisted thousands of vulnerable families and individuals in these types of situations.

The amounts granted in emergency housing SNGs are publically available. Figures for the December quarter may be found on the Benefit Factsheets published on the Ministry website at: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/.

Information about emergency housing SNGs for the quarter ending 30 September 2016 may be found at www.parliament.nz/en/pb.order-paper-questions/written-questions/document/QWA_13809_2016/13809-206-phil-twyford-to-the-minister-for-social-housing. This web link refers to former Social Housing Minister, Hon Paula Bennett's response to Phil Twyford MP's question about emergency housing SNGs.

Information about payment for accommodation in hotels and other commercial accommodation prior to 1 July 2016 is held in notes on individual case files. In order provide information on the amount of money granted for emergency housing prior to 1 July 2016, staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

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

As discussed earlier, hotels and other commercial accommodation are only used when all other options are exhausted to provide a short-term solution for those in need, while the Ministry works to make more contracted emergency housing places available. The Ministry is tasked with supporting New Zealanders who need help with housing, and the emergency housing Special Needs Grant allows the Ministry to immediately help people who are in urgent need. While increasing the affordable housing supply is one of the key objectives of the Social Housing Reform Programme, building new houses will not remove the need for immediate provision of safe, healthy accommodation for those in urgent need.

The Ministry has not analysed the number of houses that diverting funds from emergency housing could build, and your request for this information is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information 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.

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, 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



Elisabeth Brunt
General Manager, Ministerial and Executive Services