

06 DEC 2018

Miles Stratford
fyi-request-8740-f8d98250@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Miles

I refer to your information request dated 17 October 2018 in which you asked for the following:

'You have noted that no compensation was paid to people who were moved out of properties contaminated by meth residues who remained eligible for an HNZ property. Rather reasonable costs related to the move into a new house were considered and paid on a case by case basis.

Given this, please provide the following information under the OIA:

1/ In the last five years, on a year by year basis, how many tenants were moved out of an HNZ property and remained eligible for another HNZ home?

2/ In the last five years, on a year by year basis, what was the total of the reasonable costs associated with the move to the new HNZ property paid by HNZ to tenants?

3/ Of the amounts paid under 2, on a year by year basis, what was the total of the reasonable costs associated with the move to the new HNZ property paid by HNZ to tenants that related to replacement of furniture and personal items?'

Previous response to your information request 23 September 2018

Housing New Zealand has interpreted these questions to be a continuation of your earlier information request dated 23 September 2018, regarding its previous zero tolerance approach to ending tenancies as the result of a positive test for methamphetamine in its homes.

As you were advised on 17 October 2018, Housing New Zealand did not 'compensate' tenants needing to be re-located in these circumstances. Where tenants were rehoused into another Housing New Zealand home, financial support towards reasonable relocation costs were covered. Examples provided were costs relating to the disconnection and reconnection charges for gas, power, and telephone. The costs paid varied from tenancy to tenancy, and were determined on a case by case basis.

'Methamphetamine Contamination Housing New Zealand's Response' report

In September this year, the report titled 'Methamphetamine Contamination Housing New Zealand's Response' was published (the report). The report referenced a figure of around 800 tenants being affected by its past approach, and of that number, around 275 having been suspended from eligibility for state housing for one year. The report is clear in that Housing New Zealand does not hold reliable information about the circumstances of these former tenants or their families. The report goes on to say that a key learning from this review is the need for system improvements to enable more reliable recording of important tenancy details, including outcomes for tenants.

The Meth Assistance Programme

Following the release of the report, Housing New Zealand set up the Meth Assistance Programme, involving a team of staff who are available for direct contact from tenants who had been adversely affected by its past zero tolerance approach between 1 July 2013 and 1 June 2018. The purpose of the team is to consider whether or not financial assistance is appropriate, in recognition of losses incurred as a direct result of Housing New Zealand's past approach to dealing with those whose homes tested positive for methamphetamine.

As at 3 December 2018, the Meth Assistance Programme had received 297 contacts since it was set up, and of this figure, 175 cases have been approved for consideration of financial assistance. You can find information about this programme on Housing New Zealand's web page at <https://www.hnzc.co.nz/for-our-tenants-and-their-communities/our-tenants/health-and-safety/making-it-right-methamphetamine-contamination-in-our-homes/>.

In response to your information request of 17 October 2018

1/ In the last five years, on a year by year basis, how many tenants were moved out of an HNZ property and remained eligible for another HNZ home?

As mentioned earlier in this letter, Housing New Zealand estimates that around 800 tenancies were ended and not rehoused, because the tenant was believed to have been responsible for the methamphetamine contamination of one of its homes. Details about the reasons for ending these tenancies will be recorded in various ways, and in various entries on each of these 800 tenancy files. There is no ability to collect these details from a central location, in a meaningful way. Instead, a search of individual tenancy files is needed to identify how many Housing New Zealand tenants were moved out of its homes in the last five years, and relocated to another public housing home, because of a failed methamphetamine test.

I am, therefore, unable to provide you with the requested information with reference to section 18(f) of the Official Information Act (OIA) as *'the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research'*. Providing this information would remove Housing New Zealand staff from their core duties and therefore the greater public interest in the effective and efficient administration of the public service would not be served. I have also considered whether Housing New Zealand 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 both cases Housing New Zealand's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

2/ In the last five years, on a year by year basis, what was the total of the reasonable costs associated with the move to the new HNZ property paid by HNZ to tenants?

The reasonable costs of relocation for all tenants who qualify for moving to another home (not only those who required re-housing under the past zero tolerance policy) was, and still is determined on a case by case basis. These relate to the disconnection and reconnection of necessary amenities such as power, gas, and telephone services, as well as the relocation costs of the actual move.

Housing New Zealand has interpreted your question about relocation costs to be further to your question 1), and related to Housing New Zealand's past approach. Where relocation costs were paid, as defined in response to your question number 1), the information will have been recorded on the individual tenancy files. A detailed search of each of these files is required to identify the information. And depending on how many times the tenant may have moved during the six year timeframe you requested, there could be multiple relocation records involved per tenant.

As such, I am unable to provide you with the details requested under section 18(f) of the OIA as *'the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research'*. Providing this information would remove Housing New Zealand staff from their core duties and therefore the greater public interest in the effective and efficient administration of the public service would not be served. I have also considered whether Housing New Zealand 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 both cases Housing New Zealand's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

However, you may be interested to know that Housing New Zealand estimates that an amount of around \$800 to \$1,000 is the general expected cost paid by Housing New Zealand when relocating tenants (as defined earlier in this letter).

3/ Of the amounts paid under 2, on a year by year basis, what was the total of the reasonable costs associated with the move to the new HNZ property paid by HNZ to tenants that related to replacement of furniture and personal items?'

Housing New Zealand did not fund the cost of replacement furniture or personal items, which may have been lost by the tenant due to methamphetamine contamination. I am unable to provide you with the information requested under section 18(g) of the OIA as *'the information requested is not held'* by Housing New Zealand. Additionally, I refer you to my response to your request number 2), which notes that reasonable costs are covered by Housing New Zealand when relocating tenants under a business initiated transfer to assist with the costs of disconnection and reconnection of necessary amenities as the result of having to move homes.

You have the right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman if you are not satisfied with Housing New Zealand's decision on your request. You can reach that office at info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling toll free on 0800 802 602. However, if you have any questions about this response, we will be happy to help. You can reach the Government Relations Team at enquiries1@hnzc.co.nz or by phone at 0800 801 601.

Yours sincerely



Rachel Kelly
Manager, Government Relations