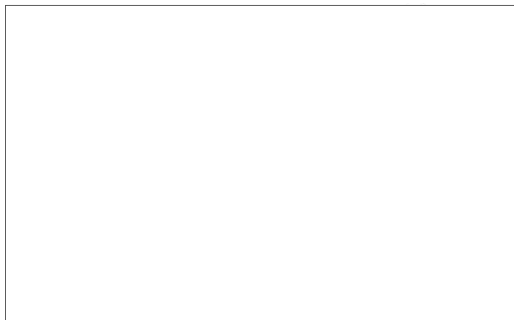




9 AUG 2016



On 10 June 2016 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information about Work and Income's policy of accommodating homeless people in motels and hotels.

As you are aware, the Government has recently announced funding for 3000 emergency housing places per year, allocating \$41.1 million over the next four years for both contracted emergency housing providers and a new emergency housing grant which is available from July 2016. This new Special Needs Grant for emergency housing does not need to be paid back. This can be paid for up to seven days while people work with us to identify alternative housing options.

I will address each of your questions in turn:

- *How long has this been going on? When was the first time Work and Income, or its predecessors, paid to put someone in a hotel/motel, or other temporary private accommodation; whether that was through a grant or loan.*
- *How long has Work and Income, or its predecessors, been giving loans to homeless people which it expected to be paid back?*
- *Are borrowers charged interest on these loans? If so, how much?*
- *Did this policy directive come from the Government and/or a particular minister? If so, who, and when? Can you supply the documents/emails/letters showing this?*

Previously Work and Income provided recoverable assistance to pay for emergency accommodation. Recoverable assistance is for beneficiaries and people on low incomes to help them meet immediate and essential needs like paying late utility bills or rent, buying essential household appliances, or meeting urgent needs for children. The Ministry grants these to people as long as they meet the income and asset test and are unable to meet the cost from any other source. Repayments are negotiated with the client based on their circumstances and no interest is charged on these debts. Repayment of the debt is set at levels which people can afford.

The Ministry has had the provision under section 11 of the Social Security Amendment Act 1979 to provide beneficiaries with recoverable assistance for immediate and essential needs such as emergency housing since that Act came into effect in 1979. More information about recoverable assistance is available on Work and Income's website here: <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/recoverable-assistance-payment-grant.html>

The policy to provide beneficiaries with recoverable assistance for emergency housing needs has been in place since 1979 over successive Governments, to provide you with documents outlining those decisions would require an extensive search of government archives, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

- *How much, in total, has been loaned to homeless people since the policy began? If possible, can amounts loaned year-by-year be supplied?*
- *How much has been paid back? Again, year-by-year if possible.*
- *How many people/families in total have been loaned money to stay in private accommodation under this scheme? Broken down by year, if possible.*

It is not possible to report on the details of emergency housing debt. While the Ministry records what hardship assistance has been provided for accommodation, it does not separately record assistance for emergency housing. Details about the type of accommodation assistance provided are recorded on notes in client files. To provide this information Ministry staff would need to review thousands of files. As such, these parts of your request are refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

Likewise the Ministry is unable to report the amount of money that has been paid back for loans made for emergency housing purposes, where those people live and the number of people who have repaid the loans, as this information is held on notes in individual files and Ministry staff would need to review thousands of client files. As such this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

In future the new dedicated non recoverable Special Needs Grant will allow the Ministry to more accurately track demand for emergency housing assistance.

- *What hotels/motels have been paid to house homeless people?*

To identify what payments have been made to motels and hotels, the Ministry would require a definitive list of specific supplier trading names for all the hotels and motels in New Zealand. Ministry staff would also need to review every client file where that client had received hardship payments for accommodation costs which would involve the review of thousands of files. As such this part of your request is refused 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.

I am sorry I could not be more helpful regarding your request for information about emergency housing and recoverable assistance. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsman
PO Box 10-152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely



Ruth Bound
Deputy Chief Executive, Service Delivery