



23 JUN 2016

Dear

On 10 May 2016 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information for the first three months concerning new social housing policy, 'Resetting Expectations' for people who decline the offer of a social house without a good and sufficient reason.

- *How many people declined a home during the first three months of this policy?*
- *How did the number of refusals for the first three months of the policy compare with the number of refusals during the first quarter of last year?*

The Ministry is still developing its reporting systems for social housing. In 2015, the Ministry transitioned from using the Housing New Zealand's IT system to its own internal IT system. This has meant that, generally, the Ministry can only run standard reporting with snapshot information. Reporting on, and tracking people, through the housing continuum is more complicated. To provide you with the data you have requested for the first three months that the Resetting Expectations policy has been in place would require significant manual collation as the information is held in note form on individual case files. As such I refuse this part of 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.

A manual analysis was completed on client activity concerning social housing declines for the period from 25 January 2016 to 18 March 2016. This analysis involved a manual review of the client records of 441 people who declined the offer of a social house in that period. The data from this analysis is what is provided in this response.

- *How many people were removed from the social housing register for declining a home without good and sufficient reason and:*
- *How long were these people removed for?*
- *How many, of those removed, are now back in government social housing.*

From the period 25 January 2016, when the Resetting Expectations Policy came into effect, until 18 March 2016, 441 clients declined a housing offer; of this number 30 people were considered not to have a good and sufficient reason and were removed from the social housing register for thirteen weeks. After further review, 4 people

had their social housing application reinstated and returned to the social housing register. To date none of the remaining 26 applicants had reapplied for social housing following their 13 week stand down.

- *Were people removed from the social housing register for any other reasons? If so, please list the reasons and the number of people involved.*

There were 65 clients who were removed from the social housing register for other reasons. This was mainly because these people no longer required a social house. The manual analysis did not breakdown all the reasons why these people were no longer on the social housing register as such this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. This information is held on individual files and Ministry staff would need to review hundreds of records. 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.

- *How many people gave an unacceptable reason for declining a house during this period? Please could you list the reasons given?*

The top three reasons cited by the 30 people who declined an offer of a social house were: the property being offered was too small, the client felt the community where the property located was unsafe, or the client felt that the property was not located close to the essential services they required. To list all the reasons why these 30 people refused an offer of a social house could lead to the identification of some of these people. As such this part of your request is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

At a base level these reasons appear acceptable. However in the 30 cases noted, further investigation showed that it was not an acceptable reason in that particular circumstance. The Ministry validates reasons for declining a property by examining the details of the client's application for social housing. An example of this is when a person declines a offer on a property because it is too small. If the property does not have the required number of rooms to appropriately accommodate all the occupants then that decline would be deemed a suitable reason, however if the person wanted a spare room to house a book collection then in that instance it would not be deemed a good and sufficient reason to decline the offer of a social house. The Ministry validates the reasons for declining an offer of a social house by reviewing the comments and discussions about why an applicant requires a social house when they apply.

- *How many people declined a home and have not been penalised since the new policy has been operating? Please list the reasons given for declining a property.*

Every applicant's circumstances are different and many factors are considered before a decision is made as to whether the applicant had a good and sufficient reason to decline the social house they were offered.

I can advise that 211 people were found to have had a good and sufficient reason to decline an offer of a social house and as such were not penalised. The decision on whether a decline of an offer on house is deemed sufficient or reasonable is based on the applicant's circumstances at the time a social house is offered. The manual analysis did not capture the decline reasons that were regarded as good and sufficient. To address this part of your request would require significant manual collation as each 211 client records to would need to be thoroughly reviewed. As such this part of 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.

Information regarding the definition of 'good and sufficient' reasons for declining a social housing property is publicly available on Work and Income's website at: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/social-housing/register-management-and-referrals/good-and-sufficient-reasons-for-declining-offer-of-01.html

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/social-housing/register-management-and-referrals/declining-offer-of-a-suitable-property-01.html

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

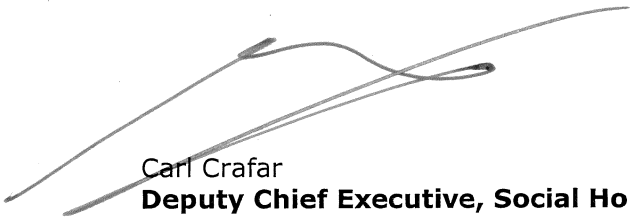
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

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 after ten working days. 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.

I hope you find this information about declined housing offers helpful. 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Crafar', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Carl Crafar
Deputy Chief Executive, Social Housing