



26 JUN 2017

Dear

On 16 February 2016 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information regarding the Social Housing Register and Social Housing declines.

On 14 March 2017, you refined the following parts of your request for the period between 16 September 2016 and 16 February 2017:

- *Any and all monitoring reports, both internal and prepared for both the previous and current Minister of Social Housing, regarding the social housing register and social housing declines.*
- *Any correspondence between social housing providers, the Ministry, and the Minister's office regarding the social housing register and social housing declines.*

For the sake of clarity I will address each of your questions in turn.

- *How many people have been removed from the social housing register since the reform programme began for declining an offer of a house?*
- *How many of those who were removed from the register were reassessed as having a "serious or severe housing need" due to a change of circumstances before the end of the 13 weeks*

Changes introduced on 25 January 2016 under the Resetting Expectations policy are designed to discourage people from refusing reasonable social housing offers, and will help house vulnerable New Zealanders sooner. The Resetting Expectations work programme has two key objectives:

- To shift client expectations about social housing from the provision of a social house for life to a suitable house that meets the applicant's need for the duration of their need.
- To help place people in most need of social housing into suitable properties as quickly as possible making alterations to the front-end placement process.

Between 25 January 2016 and 28 February 2017, there were 2945 social housing property offer declines. Of those 233 applications were removed from the Social Housing Register for declining a property offer without a good and sufficient reason. In total, 15 applications that were removed from the Register were reassessed as

having a "serious or severe housing need" due to a change in circumstances and were returned to the Social Housing Register within 13 weeks.

- *Any and all monitoring reports, both internal and prepared for the previous and current Minister for Social Housing, for the Social Housing Reform Programme.*

The Monitoring report produced by the Ministry is on-going and is regularly updated to reflect individual's current situations. I am unable to provide you with all of the Monitoring reports as the report provides detailed personal information about individual's circumstances on the Social Housing Register. However, I can provide you with an overview of the report in terms of the Register and the Social Housing declines broken down by the outcomes of the declines between 25 January 2016 and 28 February 2017:

**Table 1:** Outcome of Social Housing applications following the decline of a Social Housing property between 25 January 2016 and 28 February 2017

<b>Good and Sufficient</b> (returned to the Register)	1744
<b>Not good and sufficient</b> (removed from the Register)	233
<b>Other</b> (removed from the Register due to no longer requiring housing)	841
<b>On hold</b> (pending outcome due to; unable to contact, requiring verification etc)	127
<b>Total</b>	<b>2945</b>

- *Any guidelines used by MSD staff defining what is a "good and sufficient" reason for a client to decline a property*

Ministry staff use the following guidelines when assessing a clients' reason for declining a property. This is available on the Ministry's website at:

<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/social-housing/register-management-and-referrals/good-and-sufficient-reasons-for-declining-offer-of-01.html>

- *Any and all correspondence within the MSD and with HNZC, the office of the Minister for Social Housing, and representatives of the Office of the Ombudsman relating to my previous Official Information Act request into social housing declines made on 22 October 2015*

There is one report titled 'Official Information Act Request', dated 16 November 2015, which is in scope of your request. The report provided background information and the Ministry's advice to the Minister for Social Housing and is written in a free and frank nature.

You will note that the names of some individuals are withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the 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.

Correspondence with the Office of the Ombudsman is refused and is withheld under section 2(1)(i) of the Act.

- *Any records, reports, or correspondence relating to consultation with social housing providers on the Social Housing Reform Programme*

- *Any and all documentation or correspondence relating to the "manual analysis" of social housing declines described in the document "Social Housing Reform Programme: Resetting Expectations about Social Housing" from 15 October 2015*
- *The reasons for declining the house given by those who were removed from the register*

In order to answer some of your questions, staff would have to manually review thousands of emails as the information you have requested captures nearly all work completed by the Office of Social Housing. 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.

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

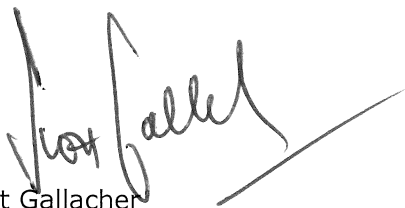
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attachments 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.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto: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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Scott Gallacher  
**Deputy Chief Executive, Housing  
Ministry of Social Development**



Date: 16 November 2015  
To: Minister for Social Housing

Security Level: In Confidence

**Official Information Act Request: Nicola Kean (The Nation) – Any stocktake or reports received by you about Housing New Zealand client declining properties; any guidelines by you or Housing New Zealand on the definition of “good and sufficient” reasons for declining a Housing New Zealand property; any Cabinet papers about changes to the rules for clients declining Housing New Zealand properties.**

**Recommended actions**

It is recommended that you:

- |   |  |                  |
|---|--|------------------|
| 1 | <b>Note</b> the contents of this report        | Agree / Disagree |
| 2 | <b>Sign</b> the attached letter to Nicola Kean | Agree / Disagree |

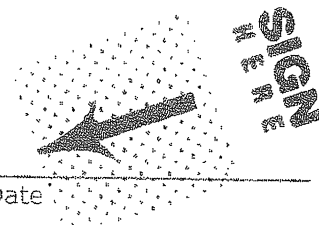
Rachel Sutherland  
General Manager  
Ministerial and Executive Services

Date

13/11/15

Hon Paula Bennett  
Minister for Social Housing

Date



## ie Date

- 1 A response is due to the requestor on or before 23 November 2015.

## Background

- 2 Nicola Kean is a producer for the Nation. This is the first request you have received from Ms Kean.
- 3 The Ministry is currently responding to another request from Ms Kean for a list of the reasons for the 414 declines cited as not "good and sufficient" by you in your speech on 22 October 2015, and the number of Housing New Zealand clients those 414 declines relate to.
- 4 You are currently responding to three other requests for information regarding clients declining social housing properties:

- **Section 9(2)(a) Privacy of Natural Persons** has requested all advice, reports, briefings and correspondence between the Minister or her Office and the Ministry of Social Development relating to social housing property declines since 1 January 2015. A response is due to s 9(2)(a) on or before 23 November 2015.
- s 9(2)(a) has requested all official reports and advice regarding the new rules to prevent people from turning down social housing. A response is due on or before 26 November 2015.
- s 9(2)(a) has requested the paper you took to Cabinet to explain the new policy for declaring declines as not "good and sufficient" and any other information that is being provided to social housing providers for consultation. A response is due to Mr Collins on or before 4 December 2015.

- 5 On 28 October 2015, you responded to a request from s 9(2)(a) regarding social housing declines:

13389 (2015) Phil Twyford to the **Minister for Social Housing** (28 Oct 2015): What is the number of times a social housing property was turned down by a prospective tenant each quarter since the Ministry of Social Development took responsibility for the social housing register which the Ministry does not believe was for a good or sufficient reason, broken down by reason?

**Hon Paula Bennett** (Minister for Social Housing) replied: I am advised by the Ministry of Social Development that a manual analysis found 414 declines, for the year ended 30 June 2015, that were not for a good or sufficient reason. Decisions about the definition of a good and sufficient reason are assessed based on the client's individual circumstances and housing needs. For example, a decline of an unfenced property for safety reasons would be considered a good and sufficient reason for a sole parent with a three year old child, but is unlikely to be considered a good and sufficient reason to decline for a single person who has no compelling reason for a fence. I am also advised that it is not possible to provide a further breakdown of declines without a good and sufficient reason as this information is held on individual client files. This analysis would require identifying and reassessing all offers declined by applicants and I do not consider this a good use of staff time by Housing New Zealand or the Ministry of Social Development.

- 6 The proposed plan outlined in *Social Housing Reform Programme: Resetting Expectations about Social Housing* to remove clients from the social housing register for thirteen weeks that decline suitable houses without a 'good and sufficient' reason

has been criticised extensively in the media lately. The Labour Party in particular has vocally opposed this plan. Two recent media articles in opposition to the proposed plan are enclosed for your reference.

## Suggested Response

- 7 Ms Kean is provided with some contextual information regarding the proposed changes to the social housing declines policy. He is informed that the proposed changes will focus on the few clients that do not have a good and sufficient reason for declining a housing property.
- 8 The four following documents are proposed to be released to Ms Kean. These are also proposed for release to s 9(2)(a) (paragraph four refers).

Item	Date	Document Description
Report	12 May 2015	Social Housing: Resetting Expectations
Declines Examples	30 June 2015	Housing New Zealand document outlining the total number of declines and reasons for the last year.
Report	5 October 2015	Resetting Expectations – September Cabinet Paper for Ministerial Consultation
Cabinet Paper	15 October 2015	Social Housing Reform Programme: Resetting Expectations about Social Housing

- 9 The four documents are proposed to be released in part. Some information is withheld under section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act as this information is under active consideration. The release of this information is likely to prejudice the quality of information received and the wider public interest of effective government would not be served.
- 10 The case studies in *Declines Examples* and one name in *Resetting Expectation – September Cabinet Paper for Ministerial Consultation* are withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the 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.
- 11 The Housing New Zealand document outlining the total number of declines and reasons for the past financial year provides a breakdown of the declines, by reason, and the number of times an applicant has declined an offer. Much of this document has been withheld as it is out of scope of Ms Kean's request.
- 12 The report and Cabinet paper titled '*Social Housing Reform Programme: Resetting Expectations about Social Housing*' seeks approval for changing the consequences for applicants who turn down a suitable property without good and sufficient reason.
- 13 An Aide Memoire titled '*Resetting Expectations about Social Housing*' dated 15 October 2015, was also assessed as in scope of Ms Kean's request. Ministerial & Executive Services propose that this document is withheld in full under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act as it contains free and frank advice from Ministry officials to you. These Aide Memoires accompanied the Cabinet paper above, and provide you with advice about the Cabinet paper prior to meeting with Cabinet. They provide recommendations from the Ministry, which if released, would prejudice the ability of officials to express their opinions in the future. The Aide Memoires outline the key issues, and the advice from Ministry officials to you on the proposed approach.

- 14 Information that does not relate to social housing declines is considered to be out of scope and is not released.
- 15 Ms Kean is referred to work and Income's website where information about the definition of "good and sufficient" reasons for declining a social housing property.

## Risks and Issues

- 16 This response is of **medium** risk.
- 17 You have publicly discussed good and sufficient reasons and the changes to the declines policy. Other initiatives including medium term work, other short term work and the ministerial direction have been redacted as out of scope or under active consideration. Some information in the case studies in the Declines Examples document are redacted under section 9(2)(a) of the Act as this information could be used to identify individuals. Housing New Zealand is aware that this document is being released.

### 18 Risk

Ms Kean may be critical that much of the information is withheld because it is under active consideration or it is out of scope.

#### Mitigation

Ms Kean is informed that only information relating to social housing declines is considered within scope and will be released.

- 19 A full risk assessment has been completed by Housing, Income Support and Employment and approves the enclosed documents for proactive release. The risk assessment is attached for your reference.

## Consultation

- 20 Housing, Income Support and Employment has been involved in this response, from compiling the relevant information to consulting on risks and the proposed response.
- 21 The Minister's Office has been provided with the response as part of the Ministry's "no surprises" approach.
- 22 A sign-off sheet is attached and tagged in the file.

File Reference: **OIA/10/15-24797**

## Record of Decision

### Has the requestor sought urgency?

No.

### Can the information be identified? Can it be found? What do we think the requestor is asking for?

Yes.

### Will answering the request require substantial collation and research?

No.

### What are the countervailing reasons to withhold the information? How do the Public Interest and the reasons to withhold weigh up?

Some information is withheld under section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act as this information is under active consideration. The release of this information is likely to prejudice the quality of information received and the wider public interest of effective government would not be served.

Some information in the case studies in *Declines Examples* and a name in *Resetting Expectation - September Cabinet Paper for Ministerial Consultation* are withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the 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.

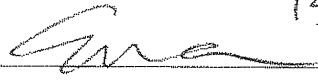
Some information in the Cabinet Paper, *Social Housing Reform Programme: Resetting Expectations about Social Housing*, is withheld under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act to protect the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions. I believe the greater public interest is in the ability of individuals to express opinions in the course of their duty.

An Aide Memoire titled *'Resetting Expectations about Social Housing'* dated 15 October 2015, was also assessed as in scope of Ms Kean's request. Ministerial & Executive Services propose that this document is withheld in full under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act as it contains free and frank advice from Ministry officials to Hon Paula Bennett. These Aide Memoires accompanied the Cabinet paper above, and provide the Minister advice about the Cabinet paper prior to meeting with Cabinet. They provide recommendations from the Ministry, which if released, would prejudice the ability of officials to express their opinions in the future. The Aide Memoires outline the key issues, and the advice from Ministry officials to the Minister on the proposed approach.

Information that does not relate to social housing declines is considered to be out of scope and is not released.



**Sign Off Sheet**

<b>Quality Assurance</b> <b>Name:</b> <b>Date:</b>	13/11/15  Agnes Sefo Manager, OPI <b>Date:</b>
The response meets the criteria set out on the QA Sheet	The response is in accordance with the requirements of the Act, addresses the scope of the request, is of good general quality, and has been properly consulted on.

<b>Communications (if app)</b> <b>Name:</b> <b>Date:</b>	Rachel Sutherland General Manager, Ma2S Date: 13/11/15
<input type="checkbox"/> No media strategy is required <input type="checkbox"/> A media strategy is attached, or noted below	The response addresses the scope of the request, is, of good quality and has been completed in accordance with the provisions of the Official Information Act.

**Business Unit One: Housing, Income Support and Employment**

<b>General Manager</b> <b>Name:</b> Anna Butler <b>Date:</b> 16/11/15	All information within the scope of this official information request has been identified by my business unit, provided to OPI, properly documented in this response, approved for release to the requestor and on the Ministry's website or withholding in part or in full, and is factually correct.
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RELEASED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT

## Document Table

The following documentation has been scoped and identified in consultation with Housing, Income Support and Employment:

No.	Date	Title	Decision	OIA Section(s)	Previously Released?
1.	12 May 2015	Report titled Social Housing: Resetting Expectations	In part.	9(2)(f)(iv)	No.
2.	30 June 2015	Declines Examples	In part.	9(2)(a) and out of scope.	No.
3.	15 October 2015	Resetting Expectations about Social Housing aide memoire.	Withheld in full.	Section 9(2)(g)(i)	No.
4.	5 October 2015	Report titled Resetting Expectations – September Cabinet Paper for Ministerial Consultation	In part.	9(2)(f)(iv), 9(2)(a), and out of scope.	No.
5.	15 October 2015	Cabinet paper titled Social Housing Reform Programme: Resetting Expectations about Social Housing	In part.	9(2)(f)(iv), 9(2)(a), and out of scope.	No.

## Official Parliamentary Team – Checklists

### Minister's Response

ITEM ONE: Response placed in plastic coloured file, please check that correct letterhead has been used	
ITEM TWO: All documentation proposed for release is marked with the 'Released Under the Official Information Act' stamp AND all documentation proposed to be withheld is printed on grey paper	
ITEM THREE: Report coversheet is printed on grey paper. The coversheet and the report to Minister is clipped together and placed behind draft response in plastic coloured file. The sign off sheet onwards is pinned to the physical red file.	
ITEM FOUR: The document table is completed and pinned to the file.	
ITEM FIVE: The original request is placed directly behind report to the Minister and tagged with a orange 'letter to Minister' tag	
ITEM SIX: A set of original documents recommended to be withheld is placed in a marked envelope	
<p><i>Please duplicate a set of the first five items for the Minister's office and stamp</i></p> <p><b>MINISTER'S FILE COPY</b></p>	
<p><i>Duplicate set of documents recommended for release (that have not previously been released) is to be retained by OPI for filing</i></p>	

### Official Parliamentary Team – Peer Review

I have consulted the Official and Parliamentary Team Quality Assurance checklist and am confident that the response and the report are of a high standard and in accordance with the Official Information Act 1982.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Ministerial and Executive Services Advisor  
 Official and Parliamentary Information Team

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

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