



2 July 2026

Ministerial Services
Partnerships and Commissions – Te Aukaha
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James Welsh
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Kia ora James,

Request for information (OIA 2526-1270)

Thank you for your request for information made under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Department of Internal Affairs (the Department) received on 27 May 2026.

You requested the following information:

Pursuant to the Official Information Act 1982, I request the following information relating to accommodation allowances claimed by the Minister:

NOTE: This includes e-mails, messages, text messages, any form of communications made on tax payer funded devices or systems, instant messenger exchanges, documents, anything that has been involved on a government device or system can be requested for transparency.

All records relied upon to determine the Minister's eligibility for accommodation allowance payments.

All records demonstrating the basis upon which accommodation allowance payments of approximately \$1,000 per week were calculated, approved, reviewed, audited, or authorised.

Confirmation of whether the Minister has declared ownership, part ownership, beneficial ownership, trust ownership, or any other legal or equitable interest in residential property within the Wellington region for the purposes of determining eligibility for accommodation assistance or accommodation allowances.

Any assessments, reviews, investigations, audits, compliance checks, or verification processes undertaken in relation to the Minister's accommodation allowance claims.

Any documents recording housing costs, accommodation expenses, rental obligations, ownership costs, mortgage-related costs, body corporate costs, rates, insurance costs, or other expenses that were taken into account when determining entitlement to accommodation allowance payments.

Any documents discussing whether property ownership within Wellington affects eligibility for accommodation allowance payments, and how such ownership is assessed.

Any documents discussing the appropriateness of accommodation allowance payments being made where the recipient owns, wholly or partly owns, a residential property in Wellington.

Any correspondence, briefings, talking points, media responses, or advice prepared in relation to public scrutiny of the Minister's accommodation allowance claims.

Any analysis, discussion, or advice concerning whether the standards proposed for Accommodation Supplement recipients are materially different from those applied when assessing ministerial accommodation allowances.

All documents recording the rationale for the current level of accommodation allowance payable to Ministers and Members of Parliament, including any analysis of what constitutes a reasonable or necessary accommodation cost in Wellington.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be means-tested, asset-tested, income-tested, or otherwise subject to financial eligibility criteria.

Any documents considering whether recipients of ministerial accommodation allowances should be required to make a minimum personal contribution toward accommodation costs before receiving taxpayer-funded assistance.

Any documents comparing accommodation allowance arrangements available to Ministers and MPs with accommodation assistance available to beneficiaries, superannuitants, low-income workers, students, or other members of the public.

Any documents discussing public perceptions of fairness, equity, consistency, or public confidence in relation to accommodation allowances claimed by Ministers.

Any documents discussing whether ownership of residential property should reduce, limit, offset, or eliminate eligibility for accommodation allowances.

Any documents recording actual accommodation costs incurred by the Minister that were relevant to determining, approving, or justifying accommodation allowance payments.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowance payments exceed, match, or fall below actual accommodation expenses incurred by the Minister.

Any guidance, policies, manuals, operational instructions, or internal procedures used to verify that accommodation allowance payments reflect genuine accommodation expenses.

Any audits, reviews, investigations, assurance reports, compliance checks, or exception reports concerning accommodation allowance claims made by Ministers or MPs during the last ten years.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowance recipients are required to demonstrate financial need before receiving taxpayer-funded accommodation assistance.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be available to individuals whose personal income exceeds specified thresholds.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be available to individuals who own one or more residential properties.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be capped by reference to actual housing costs, market rents, mortgage costs, or other measurable accommodation expenses.

Any documents discussing the reputational, political, ethical, or governance risks associated with Ministers receiving accommodation allowances while proposing stricter accommodation assistance criteria for members of the public.

Any documents, emails, messages, meeting notes, briefings, talking points, draft responses, or correspondence prepared following media enquiries concerning comparisons between ministerial accommodation allowances and Accommodation Supplement eligibility criteria.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowance recipients would satisfy the same housing-cost-to-income thresholds proposed for Accommodation Supplement recipients.

Any documents identifying recipients of accommodation allowances whose housing costs represent less than 40% of their gross income.

Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances constitute a subsidy, reimbursement, entitlement, allowance, benefit, assistance payment, or other form of taxpayer-funded housing support, including any discussion of the terminology used to describe such payments.

Any documents discussing potential reforms, reductions, restrictions, eligibility changes, or abolition of ministerial or parliamentary accommodation allowances.

Any communications between Ministers, ministerial staff, parliamentary officials, the Remuneration Authority, Treasury, or officials regarding criticism of accommodation allowance arrangements.

Lastly, and most importantly, morally, are these your values?

Background Information

The Department, through Ministerial Services, administers accommodation allowances and related entitlements for Ministers in accordance with the Members of Parliament (Accommodation Services for Members and Travel Services for Family Members) Determination 2023 (the Determination), issued by an independent entity, the Remuneration Authority.

The Department's role is limited to administering these entitlements. The eligibility criteria, level of entitlements, and overall policy framework are set by the Remuneration Authority through the Determination. The Department does not set policy in relation to these matters.

The Determination provides for accommodation assistance for Ministers and Members of Parliament whose primary residence is outside the Wellington commuting area (being Wellington City, Hutt City, Upper Hutt City, and Porirua City). Clause 15 of the Determination sets out the purpose and basis for providing accommodation services. Payments are based on estimated market rentals for suitable properties in central Wellington and are intended to contribute to, but not fully cover, associated costs such as utilities, cleaning, and maintenance.

Ministers are responsible for making their own accommodation arrangements, including entering into lease agreements and meeting all associated costs. Payments are made directly to Ministers to enable them to make these arrangements. The Department does not require itemised receipts for accommodation expenditure.

Members of the Executive are required to complete and provide a declaration form to the Department upon taking office (or when their circumstances change) to enable the Department to assess their eligibility for accommodation assistance and related entitlements.

As outlined in the explanatory memorandum to the Determination, for reasons of administrative efficiency (which is a requirement under the governing principles), the Remuneration Authority supports an approach whereby continuous accommodation payments are made on a regular basis rather than through a claim and reimbursement system. This reflects a policy introduced in 2014, which applies to both Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Further information about the Determination is publicly available at:
<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2023/0xxx/latest/whole.html>.

This background information is provided to assist in understanding the Department's role and the framework within which accommodation allowances are administered.

Response to your request

Your request was transferred to the Department from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). In responding, we have interpreted your reference to "the Minister" as referring to Hon Louise Upston, as this was the context provided at the time of transfer. We have responded on that basis.

Your request consists of a number of questions which, taken together, would ordinarily be refused under section 18(f) of the Act on the grounds that the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. However, recognising the public interest in this topic, we have made reasonable efforts to provide a response where this could be done without unreasonably impacting the Department's ability to carry out its other functions.

For ease of reference, each part of your request is set out below and responded to in turn.

On 11 June 2026, Parts 5, 10, and 18 of your request were transferred to the Remuneration Authority under section 14 of the Act, as those parts are more closely connected with the functions of that agency.

1. All records relied upon to determine the Minister's eligibility for accommodation allowance payments.

Information within scope of this part of your request is held by the Department.

However, the records include personal information relating to the Minister, including personal financial and accommodation details. This information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect the privacy of natural persons.

In making this decision, I have considered the public interest in release and have determined that it does not outweigh the need to withhold this information to protect personal privacy.

2. All records demonstrating the basis upon which accommodation allowance payments of approximately \$1,000 per week were calculated, approved, reviewed, audited, or authorised.

The basis for calculating, approving, and administering ministerial accommodation allowance payments is set out in the Determination.

To the extent the information you have requested is reflected in this Determination, it is publicly available. This part of your request is therefore refused under section 18(d) of the Act.

To the extent that any records contain personal information relating to an identifiable individual, that information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect the privacy of natural persons. I have considered the public interest in release and have determined that it does not outweigh the need to withhold this information.

3. Confirmation of whether the Minister has declared ownership, part ownership, beneficial ownership, trust ownership, or any other legal or equitable interest in residential property within the Wellington region for the purposes of determining eligibility for accommodation assistance or accommodation allowances.

Ministers are not required to make a declaration of the kind described in order for the Department to assess eligibility for accommodation support.

However, Members of Parliament, including Ministers, are required to annually disclose their financial interests, including interests in property. These disclosures are publicly available on the Parliamentary website at: <https://www3.parliament.nz/en/mps-and-electors/members-financial-interests/?lang=en>.

To the extent that any information is held that relates to a Minister's personal financial or property interests, it is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect the privacy of natural persons. I have considered the public interest in release and determined it does not outweigh the need to withhold this information.

- 4. Any assessments, reviews, investigations, audits, compliance checks, or verification processes undertaken in relation to the Minister's accommodation allowance claims.**

Please refer to the Background Information section of this letter. The Department does not undertake separate assessments, reviews, investigations, audits, compliance checks, or verification processes of the type described. Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

- 5. Any documents recording housing costs, accommodation expenses, rental obligations, ownership costs, mortgage-related costs, body corporate costs, rates, insurance costs, or other expenses that were taken into account when determining entitlement to accommodation allowance payments.**

This part of your request was transferred to the Remuneration Authority on 11 June 2026 under section 14 of the Act, as the information is more closely connected with the functions of that organisation.

- 6. Any documents discussing whether property ownership within Wellington affects eligibility for accommodation allowance payments, and how such ownership is assessed.**
- 7. Any documents discussing the appropriateness of accommodation allowance payments being made where the recipient owns, wholly or partly owns, a residential property in Wellington.**
- 8. Any correspondence, briefings, talking points, media responses, or advice prepared in relation to public scrutiny of the Minister's accommodation allowance claims.**
- 9. Any analysis, discussion, or advice concerning whether the standards proposed for Accommodation Supplement recipients are materially different from those applied when assessing ministerial accommodation allowances.**

The Department does not hold information in scope of parts 6-9 of your request. Therefore, these parts of your request are refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

- 10. All documents recording the rationale for the current level of accommodation allowance payable to Ministers and Members of Parliament, including any analysis of what constitutes a reasonable or necessary accommodation cost in Wellington.**

This part of your request was transferred to the Remuneration Authority on 11 June 2026 under section 14 of the Act, as the information is more closely connected with the functions of that organisation.

- 11. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be means-tested, asset-tested, income-tested, or otherwise subject to financial eligibility criteria.**
- 12. Any documents considering whether recipients of ministerial accommodation allowances should be required to make a minimum personal contribution toward accommodation costs before receiving taxpayer-funded assistance.**

- 13. Any documents comparing accommodation allowance arrangements available to Ministers and MPs with accommodation assistance available to beneficiaries, superannuitants, low-income workers, students, or other members of the public.**
- 14. Any documents discussing public perceptions of fairness, equity, consistency, or public confidence in relation to accommodation allowances claimed by Ministers.**
- 15. Any documents discussing whether ownership of residential property should reduce, limit, offset, or eliminate eligibility for accommodation allowances.**
- 16. Any documents recording actual accommodation costs incurred by the Minister that were relevant to determining, approving, or justifying accommodation allowance payments.**
- 17. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowance payments exceed, match, or fall below actual accommodation expenses incurred by the Minister.**

The Department does not hold information in scope of parts 11-17 of your request. Therefore, these parts of your request are refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

Please note, the Department does not have any responsibility for the administration of payments to MPs.

- 18. Any guidance, policies, manuals, operational instructions, or internal procedures used to verify that accommodation allowance payments reflect genuine accommodation expenses.**

This part of your request was transferred to the Remuneration Authority on 11 June 2026 under section 14 of the Act, as the information is more closely connected with the functions of that organisation.

- 19. Any audits, reviews, investigations, assurance reports, compliance checks, or exception reports concerning accommodation allowance claims made by Ministers or MPs during the last ten years.**

The Department has not undertaken audits, reviews, investigations, assurance reports, compliance checks, or exception reporting exercises specifically in relation to accommodation allowance claims made by Ministers in the last ten years. Accordingly, no information is held in scope of this part of your request, and it is refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

However, the Department does periodically review its administrative processes for ministerial expenditure to ensure that systems remain robust, efficient, and transparent.

- 20. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowance recipients are required to demonstrate financial need before receiving taxpayer-funded accommodation assistance.**
- 21. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be available to individuals whose personal income exceeds specified thresholds.**

- 22. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be available to individuals who own one or more residential properties.**
- 23. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances should be capped by reference to actual housing costs, market rents, mortgage costs, or other measurable accommodation expenses.**
- 24. Any documents discussing the reputational, political, ethical, or governance risks associated with Ministers receiving accommodation allowances while proposing stricter accommodation assistance criteria for members of the public.**
- 25. Any documents, emails, messages, meeting notes, briefings, talking points, draft responses, or correspondence prepared following media enquiries concerning comparisons between ministerial accommodation allowances and Accommodation Supplement eligibility criteria.**
- 26. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowance recipients would satisfy the same housing-cost-to-income thresholds proposed for Accommodation Supplement recipients.**
- 27. Any documents identifying recipients of accommodation allowances whose housing costs represent less than 40% of their gross income.**
- 28. Any documents discussing whether accommodation allowances constitute a subsidy, reimbursement, entitlement, allowance, benefit, assistance payment, or other form of taxpayer-funded housing support, including any discussion of the terminology used to describe such payments.**
- 29. Any documents discussing potential reforms, reductions, restrictions, eligibility changes, or abolition of ministerial or parliamentary accommodation allowances.**

The Department does not hold information in scope of parts 20-29 of your request. Therefore, these parts of your request are refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

- 30. Any communications between Ministers, ministerial staff, parliamentary officials, the Remuneration Authority, Treasury, or officials regarding criticism of accommodation allowance arrangements.**

Due to the breadth of this part of your request, the Department would need to search across a wide range of individuals and systems without a clear basis for identifying any relevant information.

As outlined in the Background Information section, the Department's role is limited to administering accommodation allowances and does not include policy development or leading cross-agency communications of this nature.

Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information is not held by the Department in a way that can be readily identified or made available.

31. Lastly, and most importantly, morally, are these your values?

This information is not held by the Department. The Act provides for access to information that is held by agencies. It does not require agencies to create new information or provide opinions in response to a request. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

As required by section 9(1) of the Act, I have considered whether the grounds for withholding are outweighed by other considerations which would make it desirable to release the information. I do not consider that to be the case.

We may publish this OIA response on www.dia.govt.nz (with your personal details having been removed). Publishing responses to OIA requests increases the availability of information to the public and is consistent with the purpose of the Act to enable effective participation in the making and administration of laws and policies, and to promote the accountability of Ministers and officials.

If you have any concerns with the information in this response, you have a right to request an investigation and review by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Act. Information on how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Briget Ridden

General Manager – Ministerial Services
Partnerships and Commissions - Te Aukaha
Department of Internal Affairs - Te Tari Taiwhenua