

Hon Carmel Sepuloni

MP for Kelston

Minister for Social Development and Employment

Minister for ACC

Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage

Minister for Disability Issues



22 FEB 2022

Hon Steve Chadwick QSM
Mayor
Rotorua Lakes Council
c/- Kim.McGrath@rotorualc.nz

and

Monty Morrison
Kaumatua
Ngāti Whakuae

Tēnā kōe Mayor Chadwick kōrua ko Monty Morrison

Thank you for your letter dated 24 November 2021 about the emergency housing situation in Rotorua. I would also like to acknowledge the delay in my response and your follow up letter dated 15 February 2022.

You have raised concerns about the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) issuing emergency housing grants that enable clients to live in a motel of their choice, which may not have wrap-around support available. You also highlight the ongoing effects on the local community within the vicinity of some of the motels used for emergency housing in Rotorua.

I understand the concerns you have raised and am committed to supporting Rotorua in all ways available. Although the Government has an ambitious public housing programme, the supply of public and affordable housing has not yet met the demand in Rotorua. The response to emergency housing in Rotorua is complex and with the continuation of cooperation, resourcing and locally led solutions, I hope that we will be able to effectively address some of these issues. MSD will continue working to ensure that people who experience homelessness are provided with the knowledge and skills to sustain a tenancy along with financial help to access the private rental market where appropriate.

Support Services for Emergency Housing (EHSNG) in Rotorua

MSD acknowledges that there is still support needed for those in Rotorua in non-contracted emergency housing. To help to address this, MSD has extended intensive support services provided to singles and couples staying in non-contracted emergency housing in Rotorua. This uses the existing mechanisms available to MSD to provide a dedicated bespoke response while wider system changes are being explored.

This support has been co-designed with Te Arawa Whānau Ora and Visions of a Helping Hand Charitable Trust, two groups who know their communities intimately. This initiative is alongside the collective work of Te Hau Ki Te Kainga, the Rotorua Taskforce and other agencies. These services provide heightened safety and support specifically for those motels you have identified as not being managed. As well as these contracted services, MSD is working with Police, locally and at a national level to help manage the impacts of emergency housing motels and be able to respond quickly when issues do occur.

I acknowledge that anti-social behaviour may occur in our communities and that you express concern for those living in emergency housing and the wider community. Although MSD is not able to take responsibility for people's behaviours, MSD provides support to help individuals manage their journey towards sustainable housing. This includes intensive case management, housing navigators, ready to rent programmes and a housing broker service to support people into sustainable housing. Government agencies, in collaboration with Council and community providers, are working to support those whānau and individuals to support themselves with a place-based approach, of which Council has been an active part of.

Our work in Rotorua

As you will be aware, contracted emergency housing in Rotorua is in place due to the work of the Rotorua Taskforce, supported by the Rotorua Lakes Council and Iwi from Te Arawa, as well as central government agencies. In these Ministry of Housing and Urban Development – Te Tūapapa Kura Kāinga (HUD) contracted facilities, the entire facility accommodates emergency housing clients with tamariki and support/safety services are provided to all people staying in the facility.

In Rotorua, this service is part of the Te Hau Ki Te Kainga collective response to emergency housing which emerged from the Rotorua Taskforce. This partnership is unique to Rotorua and collectively the expectation is that they will help strengthen the placement and support of clients, particularly those with tamariki, in temporary accommodation. This couldn't have been achieved without the support and collaboration between all of these groups in Rotorua.

One of the goals of the Rotorua Taskforce is to achieve exclusive use of some motels for emergency housing in Rotorua to help to address some of the issues regarding housing in the region. We understand the importance of achieving more stability for those accommodation providers supporting people with temporary accommodation. MSD and HUD are working together to develop potential ways to achieve occupancy agreements or similar, to help enable exclusive use of motels for emergency housing. With the development of these agreements, MSD is working towards reducing the number of motels being used for emergency housing. The intention is that they also have robust support services in place to help provide assurance to guests, communities and the Council while providing support and safety measures to those housed in the motels.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Rotorua Lakes Council's role in hosting, and being a member of, the Rotorua Housing Taskforce. I would like to give assurance that MSD will continue to engage in these conversations and acknowledge the invaluable understanding both the Council and those providers have of their communities.

Concerns raised regarding COVID-19

I also want to address the concerns raised in your most recent letter regarding the recent cases of COVID-19 within emergency housing in Rotorua. MSD is not placing those with COVID-19 into motels providing emergency housing. However, in keeping with advice from the Ministry of Health, we may support those who test positive to stay in their current accommodation if it is deemed safe to do so. Local officials have worked closely with motel operators, community connectors, public health units and the DHBs to manage the risk associated with COVID-19 in spaces like motels and help manage any further outbreaks.

Ongoing work to address the housing situation in Rotorua

I appreciate that this does not immediately solve the emergency housing situation facing Rotorua – but it is a leap forward in the expectations set out by the Rotorua Taskforce. The work we are undertaking now and continue to develop will help achieve a more desirable state for Rotorua.

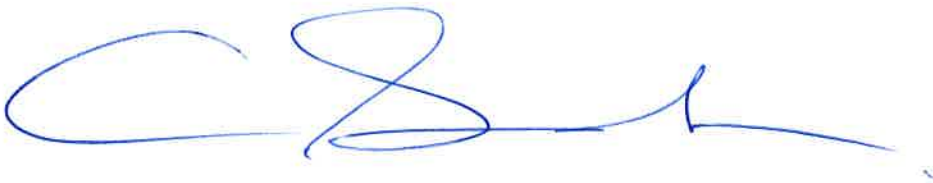
We are currently reviewing the emergency housing System, incorporating the early lessons from Rotorua as we consider the future shape of the system. This may require wider legislative change to enable the system shift.

Furthermore, Kāinga Ora is intensifying its involvement in Rotorua and is exploring and progressing several development opportunities for transitional, public, and affordable mixed-use housing.

I want to acknowledge the great work that has been done to date in partnership with local iwi, social service providers, Council and government agencies. The issues that drive and flow from homelessness are symptomatic of wider trauma for many in the community. I acknowledge that MSD alone cannot address those complexities. We need to continue to work collectively to achieve sustainable outcomes both for individual whānau and their communities.

I appreciate you writing to raise your concerns. I am committed to the Government, Council, iwi and other stakeholders continuing to work together to improve outcomes for vulnerable whānau. I have instructed officials to reach out and engage with Council to help to continue to address the concerns you have raised. I hope this information is helpful and that we can continue to have these valuable conversations to help achieve the best outcomes for the families currently in emergency housing and the communities they are a part of.

Ngā mihi nui



Hon Carmel Sepuloni
Minister for Social Development and Employment