

Complaint about the reimbursement of costs when attending the Chief Executive's Advisory Panel

Legislation	Ombudsmen Act 1975
Agency	Oranga Tamariki
Ombudsman	Peter Boshier
Case number(s)	522934
Date	June 2020

Complaint about Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive's Advisory Panel's process for reimbursement of costs—complainant was not informed of the process—Ombudsman suggested an update to the information sheet provided to attendees

Background

The Chief Ombudsman received a complaint about the reimbursement of reasonable costs for a complainant attending the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive's Advisory Panel (the Panel) in Wellington. The complainant had to travel to Wellington in order to attend the Panel hearing, and felt the process for reimbursement of his costs had been unclear.

At the time, the Panel was an independent advisory committee that could review complaints that had not been resolved through the internal Oranga Tamariki complaints process. Complainants were encouraged to attend Panel meetings, but it was not compulsory. The Panel's Terms of Reference stated that the *'the Ministry will pay actual and reasonable costs for travel, accommodation, and meals to enable the complainant to attend a meeting'*.

The complainant had offered his receipts to an Oranga Tamariki staff member on the day that he met with the Panel. The staff member declined to take them, as this was not the correct process. The complainant raised with the Ombudsman that the process for reimbursement was unclear, and caused him unnecessary anxiety on an already emotionally taxing day.

Inquiries were made of Oranga Tamariki, who explained that the process was for original receipts to be kept and submitted with a completed expense form. An information sheet was

provided to complainants before their Panel meeting, and this outlined what was able to be reimbursed, such as reasonable travel, accommodation and meal costs.

Outcome

After inquiries were made with Oranga Tamariki, the Ombudsman saw that the information sheet given to attendees explained *what* could be reimbursed, but not *how* to claim a reimbursement. He asked that the information sheet be amended to include this information, as it had appeared to cause undue stress in this case, and was important information for people attending the Panel.

Oranga Tamariki agreed to do this, and no further action by the Ombudsman was required.

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