

2 February 2024



Kia ora 

## Christmas Expenditure

Thank you for your request made under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act), received on 7 December relating to Council Christmas expenditure.

Wellington City Council has partly granted your request for information. Please find below your questions raised, follow by our response:

### End of year bonuses

- *Total amount paid in end-of-year bonuses to the CEO this Christmas.*
- *Total amount paid in bonuses to staff employed by your organization this Christmas.*
- *Please also provide the same for Christmas 2022.*

As confirmed in a response to a similar request you made to the Council in May 2023, Wellington City Council does not have a pay bonus system and therefore this part of your request has been refused under section 17(g) of the Act as the information requested is not held.

### Presents for Staff

- *Total expenditure on presents for staff including but not limited to 'secret Santa' etc.*
- *Please include this cost for last year also.*

Any secret Santa or similar gifts purchased by Council staff would have been met by an individual not from Council funding. We are therefore refusing this part of your request under section 17(g) of the Act as no Council expenses has been used for presents for staff.

### Christmas Parade

- *Total expenditure breakdown on any Christmas parade hosted or funded by the Council this year. This should also include road closure impact assessments where possible.*
- *Please include a cost breakdown for any Christmas parade last year.*

For Christmas 2023 the Council celebrated Christmas with four free whanau-friendly events, in four different parts of the city this year, each with its own unique theme.

[Christmas in the Quarters](#) saw a range of entertainment and activities, which included choirs, performances, bands, music groups, a circus, brass bands, and Christmas favourites like the snowball dome, ice rink, foam pit, and more, with Santa making a guest appearance for the main finale event at Waitangi Park.

As there was no Christmas parade in 2023, we are refusing this part of your request under section 17(g) of the Act as the information requested is not held.

Christmas 2022 saw the return of [A Very Welly Christmas](#), the parade for this event was a very small portion of this Christmas event and was billed as 'Santa's arrival' as opposed to a parade. On investigation the data we hold is not detailed enough to confirm the costs spent on Santa's arrival Christmas parade for a very Welly Christmas we are refusing this part of your request under section 17(g) of the Act as the information requested is not held.

However, I can confirm the overall costs spent on the Christmas event for 2022 as \$375,069.

Please note, alongside costs associated with Santa's arrival, this event cost includes expenses for the following:

- Performers
- Crew
- Waste Management
- Traffic Management
- Site logistics
- Equipment hire
- Technical equipment
- Theming
- Pyrotechnics (where used)
- Parades
- Christmas event includes funding towards suburban parades etc.

### **Christmas Trees and lights**

- *Number of Christmas trees purchased and erected, and the cost of these purchases for this year.*
- *Please also include the cost for any Christmas lights for tree and any lights for buildings for this year.*
- *Please also include the cost of both for last year too and highlight if the council had any left over from last year.*

A total of three Christmas trees were erected for Christmas in the Quarters, with one Christmas tree purchased in 2023 at a cost of \$45,000. This cost includes the tree, its lighting and tree star topper. All other lights used were existing stock, and no further lights were purchased.

All Christmas trees are stored and reused each year; the life span of these trees is estimated to be between 10-15 years. No trees were purchased in 2022.

### **Hiring Santa**

- *Breakdown of costs associated with hiring a Santa, please also provide this information for last year too.*

For both years, 2022 and 2023, Santa was hired directly by the event management company used for a fixed fee of \$250.

### **Christmas Market**

- *A breakdown of costs associated with running/hosting/sponsoring a Christmas market, if applicable. Please provide this information for last year, too.*

The Polish Christmas market received funding as part of the Council's Community Events Sponsorship programme, which helps community events to succeed in Wellington through facilitation, partnering and advocating.

In 2022 the Polish Christmas market was funded \$4,000 and in 2023 they were funded \$3,000. More information about the Council's Community events sponsorship can be found [here](#).

### **Christmas Party Supplies and Christmas Parties**

- *Please breakdown the amount spent on the following for the years 2022 and 2023:*
  - *Wrapping paper*
  - *Santa hats*
  - *Alcohol for parties*
  - *Party hats*
  - *Christmas crackers*
  - *Christmas cards*
  - *Christmas decorations*
- *Total expenditure breakdown on Council Christmas parties. Please also include in the breakdown any travel arrangement costs.*
- *Please include this for last year, also.*

All End of Year function costs are receipted in the Council's financing system under the account code 'Staff Welfare' which is captured by the Council's finance team. No further information is detailed against these costs except for further information being inputted into the payments 'free text' description box highlighting that this refers to End of Year function costs.

The Staff Welfare account also includes other expenses and not just limited to the End of Year functions. To confirm the information, you have requested it would require substantial collation as the free text description box for each payment invoiced to Staff Welfare would need to be manually checked line-by-line to confirm if the payment relates to End of Year functions. From November 2023 to mid-January 2024 there have been approximately 1100 payments receipted in the Council's Staff Welfare account all of which would need to be checked manually to confirm. Therefore, the decision to refuse this part of your request has been made under section 17 (f) as this part of your request as it currently stands cannot be made available to you without substantial collation and research.

However, I can confirm the Council's contribution towards End of Year functions for 2023 was up to \$30 including GST per staff member attending the function, this is the same as the 2022 End of Year functions. This amount was to cover all costs relating to the function including, for example food and venue hire. This contribution was not permitted to purchase alcohol.

### **Office Closure**

- *Duration of office closure during the Christmas period for the council generally.*
- *Please specify how many managers and senior executive staff are taking more hours/days out of office than is blanket across the council for the Christmas period.*
- *Does the Christmas office closure also affect contactors paid by the council? If not, how much are they being paid over the Christmas break in an hourly rate?*

Council offices do not shut down over the Christmas break. For example, our Contact Centre operates 24-hours a day, 7 days a week all year round taking calls from members of the public.

Whilst the Council offices remain open, all staff who are not required to work over the Christmas period (25 December to 5 January) were encouraged to take advantage of this two-week break. This is in line with the [Holidays Act 2003](#), the purpose of which is to promote balance between work and other aspects of employees' lives and, to that end, to provide employees with minimum entitlements to annual holidays, which includes opportunities for rest and recreation.

Any leave taken is in line with the annual leave entitlements within employment agreements throughout the year.

Most contract service providers offer their staff a 'shutdown period' but certain staff will continue to work through this period to ensure that essential services such as rubbish collection continue to function. Furthermore, in the event that additional members of contractor staff are required over the holiday period, the Terms & Conditions of the contract make allowance for this.

We are unable to break these costs down as would involve going through all invoices sent from contractors over the holiday period and are therefore refusing this part of your request under section 17(f) of the act as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

#### **Fines**

- *Does the council have any plans to increase fines for parking offences or any other offences during the Christmas period?*
  - *If so, which fines are increasing, why and what revenue is expected to be raised?*

The Council does not set the fees against parking fines issued. The maximum fees a council can charge are set out in the Land Transport (Offences and Penalties) Regulations 1999. More information can be found [here](#).

Please note, alongside no time limits, metered on-street parking was free around Wellington on all public holidays (25-26 Dec and 1-2 Jan).

#### **Right of review**

If you are not satisfied with the Council's response, you may request the Office of the Ombudsman to investigate the Council's decision. Further information is available on the Ombudsman website, [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz).

Please note, we may proactively release our response to your request with your personal information removed.

Thank you again for your request,

Kind regards

Ollie Marchant  
**Official Information**