

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING  
BY DEPUTY S.Y. MÉZEC OF ST. HELIER  
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 12<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2016**

**Question**

Further to the action points raised in the March 2016 Housing Strategy, could the Minister –

- (a) outline the policies described in Action point 1.2, and, if they do not yet exist, advise what are they likely to include;
- (b) advise how she intends to incentivise vacant property owners in accordance with action point 2.6;
- (c) outline how she intends to enforce the minimum standards for the physical condition, repair and maintenance of all categories of rental accommodation referred to in action point 3.3;
- (d) state how she intends to “encourage residents to make homes more energy efficient and therefore cheaper to run” in accordance with action point 3.4;
- (e) commit to opposing any further cuts to support for recipients of Long Term Incapacity Allowance, given that action point 4.2 says: “Promote independent living for residents with specific needs”;
- (f) advise whether the review of the current system of residential regulation to create a more equitable rental market under action point 4.4 includes a review of the impact of the introduction of rent control?

**Answer**

The Housing Strategy outlines an aspiration that all islanders should be able to live in secure, high-quality homes that they can afford, and establishes a set of objectives towards achieving this aspiration, including:

- ensuring balanced housing supply;
- making the best use of housing resources;
- improving standards; and
- creating strong communities.

The Housing Strategy will be supported by a series of specific policy measures, which will be developed in accordance with the timescales that are set out in the Strategy and will be subject to consultation with stakeholders. As such, the overall response to points (a) to (f) of the question is that the Housing Strategy provides an overview of initial thinking in terms of policy development, and that the development of further evidence, evaluation of options and consultation on specific policy proposals will provide the answers to these questions as the Housing Strategy is implemented in the coming years. Where specific points can already be made, these are outlined below.

On point (a), I intend to publish an affordable housing paper in Quarter 3 of 2016. This paper will provide an assessment of the term ‘affordability’ in relation to property purchase prices and household incomes, and how affordability can be improved through measures such as affordable home ownership products. The eventual policies will make use of the results of the latest Housing Needs Survey to ensure that there is an appropriate mix of tenure types (affordable homes to rent and to purchase) to meet demand for affordable housing.

In respect of point (b), the Housing Strategy includes an action to identify ways to make vacant properties available to the market. I would expect this work to be started in Quarter 2 of 2016 and completed in 2017. One policy option might be to consider parish rates in the context of long-term vacant properties, which would need to be considered in cooperation with the Comité des Connétables.

Improving the condition of homes is a primary objective in the Housing Strategy. In response to point (c), draft legislation is, therefore, being prepared to introduce minimum standards of repair and maintenance for all categories of rental accommodation, including a means for the Environmental Health Department to monitor and enforce minimum standards. The draft Health and Safety (Rental Dwellings) Law should be brought forward by Quarter 3 of 2016 and work is already underway.

Along with the condition of homes, the Housing Strategy also recognises that homes need to meet higher energy efficiency standards (point (d)). The Strategy is aligned with the Energy Plan Pathway, which the Minister for Planning and Environment published in 2014, and I will be working closely with the Minister to encourage investment in energy efficiency measures to reduce domestic energy consumption such as changes to the Building Bye-Laws.

In response to point (e), whilst it is not directly related to the Housing Strategy, the Minister for Social Security has not reduced the value of Long Term Incapacity Allowance, but has changed the treatment of the overlap between Income Support and LTIA benefit income. As part of the Housing Strategy, I am working with the Minister for Social Security and affordable housing providers to meet the housing needs of vulnerable people, including people with disabilities, care leavers, and ex-offenders, to support them to live independently.

Finally, as point (f) of the Deputy's question indicates, the Housing Strategy includes an action to review the current system of residential qualifications to create a more equitable rental sector, which I anticipate be carried out by early 2017. This does not include a review of the impact of the introduction of rent controls. As I indicated in R.87/2015 'Rental Sector in Jersey – proposed policy direction,' I am not minded to introduce rent controls. The advice provided by the Economics Unit was clear that rent controls reduce the availability of rental accommodation and reduces the quality of rental accommodation

Rather, my focus is on supporting affordability through an increased supply of affordable homes for rent and purchase, and delivering on our Island Plan commitment to build 1,000 affordable homes up to 2020. Supply is tightly balanced, which makes it essential that all sites identified in the Island Plan are brought forward, including on rezoned and former States-owned land, and on existing estates such as La Collette.

Overall, the measures set out in the Housing Strategy are intended to improve people's housing situations and help them to achieve their housing aspirations. The Strategy recognises that there are considerable challenges and we cannot make things better overnight – but we can move firmly and clearly in the right direction.