

2024.12.10

**Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier Central of the Minister for the Environment regarding residential space standards (OQ.238/2024):**

Further to the adoption of paragraph (a) of P.87/2023, and the response to Oral Question 84/2024, will the Minister advise what progress, if any, has been made with the review of residential space standards?

**Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):**

Can I start by apologising to the Deputy and to the Assembly. I was embarrassed when I looked back to find that the last time I answered a question on the subject was 30th April, so certainly a number of months have transpired since then and I have not made the progress I had intended. But I will, following today, instruct officers to go away and come back to me with work so I can give consideration to the space standards for one-bedroom, one-person units in response to the Assembly's support for Deputy Cole's part (a) of his proposition. There will be a number of things to consider before we make any potential changes, but I will work to conclude the review as quickly as I can and report back to the Assembly at that time.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

I thank the Deputy for his answer.

**3.10.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:**

Will the Minister, in asking for work to be conducted, also consider work from officers to look at the desirability and interest in the different housing stock, noting the perceived perhaps glut of one and 2-bedroom apartments on the market and what is required for Jersey's long-term housing in that review?

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Yes, I would expect that to be part of the work. I think it is important to see what demand there is for certain types of tenured homes, one bedroom, 2-bedroom, maybe 3, and family homes in particular I know are in great demand and it is right that we look at that too.

**3.10.2 Deputy M.B. Andrews of St. Helier North:**

I want to know the Minister's view on increasing minimum-sized standards of a one bedroom and how this may impact prices of one bedroom that are available on the market?

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I think my view is going to be informed by the work that is done, but I would say to the Assembly, to Members, that in recent times, the space, the required standards have increased by up to 25 per cent. So we have recently made some great strides in increasing these minimum space standards, but I would also want to consider - and I could take Deputy Coles's view on board - a one-person flat being the same size as a 2-person flat, but then how the 2 people feel about having a flat given to them that is exactly the same size as a single person. There is lots to consider there. It will form part of the work, certainly, as the Deputy raises the issue of cost. Every time we raise standards, we increase building costs, we increase the difficulty of young families being able to afford property; maybe single people, just a couple. We have to bear that in mind as well. Affordability is really important. If people cannot afford to buy property, it will stay empty.

**3.10.3 Deputy M.B. Andrews:**

In terms of how professional evaluators will evaluate the property that they are looking at, can the Minister confirm whether increasing the minimum size standards of one-bedroom properties will see increases in market prices of one bedrooms?

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I think that would be inevitable. If we increase the size of a property, it will cost more to build, and the developer will need to realise a return on his investment. I would think it inevitable that if we make the minimum standards larger, that would have to be reflected in the cost of building.

**3.10.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

The Minister, in his quarterly hearing last week and in other moments when the panel and the Minister discussed the Budget, he talked very much about the need to streamline work because of limited resources within his department due to the cuts that had to be made ahead of the Budget for 2025. The Minister has now indicated that this work will be put on the agenda. I was wondering if he could say if there is anything that he would have to push down the list to then have this work completed in 2025.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Officers have furnished me with a great long list of work which I have completed, work which I have in train at the moment and work still to do, but I think I will say to the Deputy that I did commit to doing this work in April. As I said at the outset, I am a bit embarrassed that I have not progressed that in any way, shape or form. One of the things I committed to doing was visiting these properties to see how they physically look to me and how the difference between one person living in a certain size property will differ to 2 people. Obviously in many areas you do not need more space but in others you do. If you have 2 people you have twice the number of need for clothes storage and stuff like that, bike storage. So there is lots to consider and I did commit to doing this work. I can at the very least go and see these properties, see what they mean, and give an initial report back to the Assembly in short order.

**3.10.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

I am not sure the Minister answered my question, if there were anything on the other areas of his work that had to be deprioritised because of this work because we had not heard this being part of his work. I know he committed in April, but since then, in discussions, we have not heard from the Minister that this was on the list. If it is on the list, that is fine, but if not, what will be deprioritised?

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

It may not have been on a list. I do not particularly think that it is a large piece of work. Certainly, my visiting property to see what they actually look like, does not involve any additional work for officers. I would hope that those initial assessments by me personally would inform a short report, which I can come back on. Certainly, if I get to the conclusion that I am not going to change the standards, I do not think that there is very much of a report required.

**3.10.6 Deputy T.A. Coles:**

This was raised with me by a member of the construction industry at a recent planning meeting. Can the Minister acknowledge that further delays on this is causing more uncertainty for our developers as well?

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I am not sure that it is, but I only say that because none of them have raised it with me. But I would go back to my original answer, I have committed and I will make sure officers put me out there and get these visits done and make these initial assessments, so that if there is any uncertainty, that can be taken care of as soon as possible.

[10:45]