



# Environmental, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel

Quarterly Review Hearing

**Witness: Minister for Housing and Communities**

Wednesday, 1st February 2023

**Panel:**

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (Chair)

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier North

**Witnesses:**

Deputy D. Warr of St. Helier South, Minister for Housing and Communities

Ms. N. Day, Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration

Ms. S. Duhamel, Associate Director of Social Security, Population and Housing Policy

[11:31]

**Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (Chair):**

Well, good morning, Minister, welcome to this quarterly public hearing and can I start by thanking you for delaying for a week. I know this was scheduled previously but more important things came up last week and we were grateful for that delay. Before we start we will just run through both sides of the table. Deputy Steve Luce, Chair of the panel.

**Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central:**

Deputy Rob Ward, Vice Chair of the panel.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier North:**

Deputy Mary Le Hegarat.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Apologies from Constable Jackson who is at the prison. On a visit I might add, not permanently. Minister.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Deputy David Warr, obviously Minister for Housing and Communities.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Natasha Day, Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration.

**Associate Director of Social Security, Population and Housing Policy:**

Sue Duhamel, Associate Director of Social Security, Population and Housing Policy.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Thanks very much. Minister, let us start off straight away with rent control tribunal. I know that we have had some delays. You have asked for a delay yourself and I know you are keen to explain to the panel why and how, and I am sure you would like to do that. So can you provide us with any details?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, I think what has happened has been this big sort of learning lesson of the complexities of the law and can we do a better job. I think what has become very apparent to me as we were going along this road is that the law which was going back to 1946 was very narrow and there is a danger that we would just ... it turned out that we were just picking away one element and we are currently developing a new law under the R.T.L. (Residential Tenancy Law) 2023-24 and so what we want to do is ... what I would like to do is I would like to encompass that in that new law and have a wider remit created. It just appears that we are, as I say, taking bits and pieces. We are talking about housing legislation which goes back over 70 years and there are just so many old laws and bits and pieces that every time I seem to lift a new stone I discover something new. I was reminded of something here today actually, funnily enough, which was given to me, which is a rental sector in Jersey and a law turned out ... I think it was a 1936 law. It is just bonkers how many old laws there are still in existence. So my objective right now is to clean it up, make it better for everybody, that is tenants, landlords and then have protections in there built within that law, that overarching law which will deliver a fit for purpose future law.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

So to be clear then, Minister, the Residential Tenancy Law would replace all those laws that we are talking about?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is what I would like to do, absolutely. I really would like to see those other laws rescinded. I would like to see the 1946 law rescinded, I would like the 2011 law updated, the 2023-24 law to overtake that and just simply clean up what I consider to be an unmitigated mess.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Do you have a timing on this?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

The law is being written up at the moment, 2023, so it would be one of the things I would like to do first of all is to produce a white paper, okay, which I would like to bring to the Assembly, which identifies the scope of the work that we are doing. So if we can have a discussion in 2023, I would like to have that in place probably by 2024. That is where I want to be. That is my timeline at the moment.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Where are you then with coming back to the Assembly, getting back to the rent control tribunal, when we are coming back to the Assembly with that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, the rent control tribunal I think will in reality be ... we will remove that, we will just pull that at the next opportunity. It will not be this one, it will be the following one because I am away for the next Assembly sitting.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, so the intention now is to not come back to the Assembly at all for rent control tribunal?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct. Correct.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, does that give us ... are you happy that there is enough protection in place for both sides of the argument?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, the reality is that the rent control tribunal, which we have tried to get through obviously a number of settings ... you know, times through the Assembly and we have failed to do so. So for one reason or another we have had a reference back and we have had questions over the make up of the panel. We have had all sorts of issues dealing with that. Each time each of those debates has raised new questions about what is happening and how the landscape looks, I think is what I would say. One of the interesting areas around all of this has been ... in fact following the discussions on that was Deputy Feltham's question to us. She did a written question to us about social housing providers and that, again, made us question we have no real proper provision for social housing providers and we feel that we want a level playing field for both private and social housing. There is a lot more that we want to bring in to the new law, which is not currently in place at the moment.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Is it not simply the fact that the rent control tribunal would simply have not had the teeth that you wanted it to have because of the inadequacy of the law?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, it is just simply too narrow. Yes, just too narrow. All we are doing is we have a little piece of law here and what we want to do is I want to bring it in under an overarching law and then we hang these things within that law. That is my objective now.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

You would agree that the Assembly will have actually played a really good role there in the reference back and the questioning?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I would agree with you. Yes, I would agree with you.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Have you had any feedback from tenants and landlords? Just to take 2 steps back, the decision to actually not come back to the Assembly now is certainly new to me, I do not know if it is new to others, it may be new to lots of people. Have you had discussions with tenants, landlords about not coming back?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, not at all. Not at the moment, no. Because at the end of the day we do not have a tribunal in place at the moment so there is nothing ... nothing has physically changed as far as the general public's concerned. So what we are doing is obviously trying to improve that situation.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I just ask quickly, Chair? So the not coming back means it will not be coming back with a tribunal so it will not exist?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Is there a legal issue there because I can remember in one of the long debates over this that the A.G. (Attorney General) made the point that there is a legal requirement, I think, for a rent tribunal in the old law anyway?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

There is under that law. I do not know ... as I say we have not had a rent control tribunal panel in place for 15 years. The fact that it is not there for another 16 or 17 years I am assuming is of an issue because obviously someone - I presume one of my predecessors - would have brought that up as being a major stumbling block. But, again, in answer to your question, I do not know, I am sure we can get advice from the A.G.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Sorry, just to be clear then, Minister, we will carry on as is, as we have done for a number of years now, we will carry on for another few months, maybe 12, maybe 18 or so, at which point a new law will come in and it will cover stuff, including a rent control tribunal?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, correct. But the rent control ... well my picture of it and how I see it is to give it greater what I call bandwidth because at the moment what happens is ... so one of the aspects in terms of the rent control tribunal is a lot of people if they want, for instance, to extend their ... we were talking about evictions, forced evictions, people have to go to the courts to get extensions on that. Now, one of the areas in 2011, and I have to say this is something that cropped up in the Assembly, is what power does the Minister have. Well, the Minister has powers to or can create orders to extend that but they extend it across the whole piece, they cannot pick out individual ... I was under the impression we could pick out individual issues. That is not the case, it turns out we the order is a much broader issue. But what I want to do is, what I want to just say to carry on from that, I personally think that there is an issue that too much maybe referenced to the courts. I think there is an opportunity for us to create a panel, which is a sort of housing tribunal that can deal with some of the stuff that may have gone to the courts before and may be prohibiting people approaching a panel

for rectification, whether you are a landlord or a tenant. So I think we have an opportunity here to have a broader brushstroke in that area.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Do you mind if I ask you some more about that? What would be your advice to somebody who is renting and has an issue? There is no rent control tribunal, but it would not have any teeth anyway but where do they go? It is clear that you cannot, as Minister, make individual decisions, you are saying ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

When you say individual decisions, what do you mean by that?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Well, that is a good question, whatever they may be. So, for example, if it is on rent and it is going up inappropriately and there is an eviction which is because they have made a complaint or something, what is their protection? Is it simply the case - and if it is I think it is important we are honest - that there is no protection until we update that law?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I mean the protection is within, obviously, your current tenancy agreement. You know what you had signed to and what you have agreed to. So that will have some teeth. However, I believe that under a new residential law we could improve that, have greater teeth, as it were. That is my view on it.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

But there is the capacity for the Minister to make blanket extensions?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Or at least that was the case.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It is the case right now as we speak on the 2011 law, yes.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I was just going to add that recognising the issues with the legal frameworks that exist and are at present unavoidable issues until new laws are put forward. We have launched the housing advice

service in C.L.S (Customer and Local Services) and that was soft launched over a year ago but hard launched last October. That service exists to provide tenants with advice and guidance and support when they are facing specific tenancy issues. It would be good to see that service more actively used and, you know, people do have somewhere to go if they are facing issues with their accommodation.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Is there a job of promotion then if that has been in place and not widely used?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

We have just been talking with C.L.S. about that in the last week. About the adequacy of resources and how we may more actively promote the service.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I suggest something? One of the benefits of the new system of election with more Deputies is there are more drop in sessions, certainly in St. Helier, is there anything you produce we could get in our drop in sessions and have there as a good conduit and should we ever manage to get constituency officers that would be a perfect place for it. This new board or whatever, I do not know what you are going to call it, would that not face the same issues about the tenancy law behind it. Would that not become another level of advice or would that be something that may become a sort of triage system to reference things to you that might need action?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It can be, it is yet to be ... we have not developed that policy significantly yet because, as I say, this is all happened in the last 4 or 5 weeks so we are currently, I would say, policy under development. It very much is. But it is an important element to get right and it is not just simply within the private sector. One of the other issues highlighted by Deputy Feltham's written question to us was about the lack of formality in the social housing sector, so that is with the Trusts, with Andium, there is a lot of assumptions being made and what we would like to do is to make that more formal. We think that is an opportunity to do that within this new law.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Just thinking about that further, Minister, before we move to a different subject. So I take it you will be having discussions with Andium and the providers then during the development of the law?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct. Correct. One of the areas, and how I see it and I talked about a White Paper being developed, so what I would like to see us to is we develop a White Paper which incorporates all of

these ideas and concepts. We bring that to the Assembly for discussion, for people to look at, tear apart, say: "Look, we think you should have more teeth here or various areas like that" and that will then help us bottom out the law a lot more. As you say, that will be basically involving all stakeholders such as the social housing providers.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I know we have spoken about timings for the law but what about timings for the White Paper?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I would ideally like to see ... I am going to look at my officers here. I would like to see something in the next 4 to 6 weeks, that would be my timeframe.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I just ask one more question on that? When you consult, will you be consulting the areas of our population, those migrant communities who come in on temporary contracts who do not have housing qualifications, one of the really big issues in housing standards in that area.

[11:45]

There are certainly growing issues around there with entitlement or not. Would that be one of the things you look at and, if so, how are you going to engage with those communities because that is a challenge?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I get that. I think probably immediately comes to mind is C.A.B. (Citizens Advice Bureau). That would be one of my mechanisms possibly to have a look at. Because they obviously deal with a lot of queries within the minority community work force. I am happy to listen to you to say actually why do you not consider this area.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I certainly know a group of people who do have good connections in those communities so I am happy to encourage that because it could be something that is really advisory at the beginning.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I totally agree. Totally agree.



**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Before we finish, Minister, there is obviously 2 sides to a lease and I take it you will also be talking to landlords because there is some protection required there at times?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Absolutely, yes. We also ... I met with the non-panel as it has turned out to be, rent control tribunal panel, yesterday and we will be in discussions with them, yes, and asking them for their thoughts on that area.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, final question then. This Residential Tenancy Law, it is certainly news to us this morning that you are not coming back with the tribunal. Will you be putting out a press statement to say what you have just told us?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Happy to. Without being funny, I think it is new. It is very, very new. We only literally have made this decision in the last couple of weeks and it is under a lot of discussion internally around this area. I am happy to but I am not sure there is an absolute need to do that.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

No, no, I was just asking the question whether you intended to.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am sure it will come out in the news anyway but I think the reality is we are trying to get something far, far better than we were originally looking for. I think the irony of it all is despite all the debates and the humming and hawing, I think it is going to end up resulting in a far better solution for both landlords and tenants.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I was just about to say that, better to wait a few more weeks and in a couple of months come out with something better than carry on with something which is not fit for purpose. Okay, let us move on then and Deputy Ward is going to ask some questions about modern methods of construction.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Thank you, Chair. Minister, on 12th October 2022 you published a report *Modern Methods of Construction*, can you outline the next actions that will be put in place with regards to the modern methods of construction process?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Process, right. Can I pass that on to you, Natasha? Thank you.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

So there were 6 commitments in that report. We met with construction sector representatives, representatives from Education, Highlands, in November last year to begin to design the creation of the construction sector innovation hub and that will be progressed this quarter to get that off the ground. With respect to ministerial commitments to work together in better partnership, that falls within the remit of the of the Future Places Ministerial Group. We are actively involving Ministers in projects that are underway. So you will know that Field J525 in St. Martin, in affordable housing sites, sponsored by the parish is currently using modern methods of construction and are building affordable houses at speed and to a really high quality. It is a great looking scheme. We also have the housing development, the Limes which is now well under way using the Hadley steel frame system by Andium. That is a modern method of construction, bringing forward again more affordable homes to be occupied in the next couple of years.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Is it the method of construction that is making them more affordable or is it simply that they would have been affordable homes, it is just another method of constructing, good, bad or indifferent - I do not know enough about it to comment on that? What benefits are we seeing from this tangibly for our housing stock?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I will be clear that it should not be regarded a cost saving, it is about speed and efficiency of delivery and it is about improving the productivity of our construction sector.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

So it will not necessarily be ... I just remember before the election the Construction Council had a meeting and one of the clear things was exactly that, that is not a cost saving. I think it is very important that people understand that.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Depends what you mean by cost saving. If you save time you save cost.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

What I mean by cost saving is how much people are going to be paying for the bottom line is exactly that.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

But it is delivery as well. It is important to have good delivery, speed delivery up, you know.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

They are reliant, these methods, on infrastructure being in place to fit everything in? So everything has to be connected? I am not a builder so I do not know.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Modern methods of construction is a very broad terminology and this is explained in the *M.M.C. (Modern Methods of Construction)* report going from what people would see as traditionally prefab homes where these are kind of plug and go houses all way through to things like the Hadley steel frame system that Andium are using, which is about the super structure of the building and offsite manufacturing processes. So it depends on the type of system that you are using as to the type of issues that you will face with the infrastructure that either enabled you to get the product to the site - prefab units are difficult to navigate our narrow country roads, for example - or the infrastructure, the services that are required or the skills that are required. It is very important that the construction sector drive this because they understand how to build buildings and they know what works and they know what skills they have or need to make it work. That is why the construction sector innovation hubs is seen as the main action from the Minister's report because it is about us supporting the industry to innovate and build better and faster.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Minister, what do you see, what are you wanting to see, that is tangibly different that you could point out in 2 years' time from these methods of construction that may have been different from any other?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think Natasha has just referenced the Limes. It is interesting the speed at which these buildings can be put up. You know, we have lots of developments going on at the moment in time and I think if we can speed that up, the pressure is on housing supply, is it not? We know we have this waiting list on the Gateway. We know in general there is a lot of people who have not made their intentions known that they want new accommodation so the sooner we can do that delivery the better. As Natasha just highlighted there, for me speed is of the essence as long we keep and maintain quality and that is the crucial element to all this.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

So you can construct houses quickly, they can be superior quality and that is all fantastic. We are starting to hear noises about constraints within the drainage system on the Island, is that something

that has been relayed to you? Because it is all very well having permission to build and constructing homes but if you cannot plug the drains in they are of no use.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, and we are very conscious of that issue. It is a much bigger piece as far as we are concerned. You are absolutely right, we cannot just say: "Let us just build more houses and let us forget about everything else around" we have to think about the whole piece. Our drainage system has been underinvested in for decades now sadly and I think it needs a lot of catching up. As far as I am aware what we have and what we are building at the moment does have sufficient drainage, I have not be told that is not the case, however it is an issue going forward in the long run and one of the things I would say out loud is that I do not believe Government is best placed to look after our drainage systems. In my view, I feel we should outsource it in the same way that Andium Homes was pulled out of the States of Jersey because it is always the last piece to get invested in going forward and I am very uncomfortable with that right now. Some very big decisions need to be made in that area.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Yes, I am not going to disagree with any of that, Minister, but it will not matter whether it is state owned or privately owned if our drainage infrastructure is not capable of supporting further development for affordable homes, for social homes for whatever. It is obviously clearly an issue for the whole Island.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I agree and that is why I said it is a very big piece. Right now, as far as I understand, I have not heard any of our developments being delayed because there is insufficient drainage. That has not been relayed to me at all at the moment.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, well I am sure we will talk about that one further as we move on. Certainly as a panel we are going to be looking at that.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Rightly so.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Rent-a-room is the next topic.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

That is me again. Minister, could you provide the panel with an update so far on the uptake of the rent-a-room scheme?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We do not know is the simple answer to that. I cannot give you any physical numbers on that at all but we know it is out there, the feedback has been: "Thank you for bringing it on board" so I think there has been a positive reception to those. I know, is it, the language school has been out advertising, looking for rooms to house their students, which was one of the issues. I think the one area which my attention has been drawn to, and I think it was something you brought up, and this is around about safety, family safety. I just want to really say that the one big area that I have not already said is that people must remember there are disclosure and service systems that you are able to check people out if you are concerned about who you are letting a room to. So I know that was an area of concern. I have also been told by the C.L.S. Department that if there are individuals who we are slightly unsure of, who are looking to rent rooms, they are tracked very carefully and so for people to say that a stranger just turns up on the doorstep and they could already have a history of something which is not appropriate for them to hire the room, they do track these people very carefully. I am conscious that this is only ... it is something that has been done for years and years and years but I just feel like I need to address your concern which was brought up in the Assembly around safety.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Yes, because that is, again, both sides of the fence here. Do we track landlords in the same way that you are talking about tracking potential tenants?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

When you say a landlord, I mean a landlord is an individual at the end of the day, so if they have a criminal record then what their activity is, I would think you would check that, would you not?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Sorry, I am a bit surprised by that. What is the mechanism then for checking that the landlord you are going to rent a room from does not have a record?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Does not have a record?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

It is requirements under the Sexual Offences Law. So if you are a registered sex offender you have to remain in communication with ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

What if you are not but there are other things like coercion or a record of something else?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Domestic violence as an example. It is only sex offenders that attract ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, and that is one part of it, of course a very important part in terms of safety but are there safeguards elsewhere?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

On that element, I do not know, is the answer to your question there but I would just quickly say ... I just want to pull this back a little bit. The only reason I address this is because this has been ... this is not something new that has just suddenly been dreamt up, this is simply around about tax relief for people who want to rent a room and are looking for additional income. I do not want us to get dragged into: "Oh, you have just created a new rule and you have created a whole new cohort of people who are suddenly going appear looking for rent-a-rooms."

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

With respect, Minister, you may not want to get dragged into that but you were given a tax incentive which may increase it and you said that you do not know what the uptake is, so how will you be collecting data and monitoring the scheme?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

If I can confirm, this is a Minister for Treasury and Resources initiative not a Minister for Housing and Communities.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, we asked some questions about that before so, okay.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

In terms of the data collection, we will not know how many people have taken up the scheme until everyone has completed their tax return.

**Associate Director of Social Security, Population and Housing Policy:**

We will never know. We will never know because the whole point is that is ... just to be clear, there is an existing tax concession for people renting rooms in their houses today, that was before when

it started, yes. So it has always been possible to rent a room and there has always been a generous tax concession in respect of the rent, the income received. This is an additional tax concession from the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the point is that you did have to declare it on your tax form if the total income is less than £10,000. So we will never know how many people take up this particular scheme because it is exempt from being declared to the Government. The way that we will know indirectly is that why do we do ... why did Ministers choose to take this on, because they were concerned about the shortage of particularly worker accommodation last summer and we were also very well aware ... I am sure the Minister will talk later to you about vacant homes and under-occupied homes. There is a loss of property in Jersey that is being severely under-occupied at the minute and therefore anything we can do to encourage people to make better use of the homes that already exist here with existing drainage connections and everything else will be really good. This is just one small little step by the Government to do that. When they ask how we will know, we will know it has been successful indirectly by it being slightly easier for employers to employ staff.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Okay, well in the Assembly when this was brought forward it was very much promoted as a way of tackling housing issues and the housing crisis but if you cannot target it, which you cannot, and you are just hopeful that will be in the case and you have indirect information, Minister, how can you assure that the money being spent is being spent effectively or how can you --

[12:00]

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We are not spending any money.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Well, you are reducing income which I am sure if I brought something to the Assembly at reduced income it would be seen as spending money so let us not go down that line. But in terms of the success of ... I suppose the question is who are you targeting?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

As Sue has just mentioned there mentioned there, we would anticipate people wanting lower cost accommodation. Accommodation full stop.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

So that is workers ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That would be workers, that is what ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

But would it be people who are not somewhere on the Gateway that would then just find a room to live in and they would be seen as no longer an issue.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, that is not our objection.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

So there is some wider benefits of this. I think the key benefit is making better use of the housing stock we already have. We have people under-occupying their properties where there are opportunities, even to family friends, to make better use of that home. At the moment if they rent that property out ... that part of their property out they will be taxed for doing so. So there are some societal benefits, there are people living on their own who would like to make better use of their home and that may be the decision that helps them to stay in their home and not be forced to move somewhere that they do not want to go because they are generating an income from the space that they have. There are equally benefits to this scheme, which obviously has been our focus ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Sorry to interrupt but there might but we do not know because we do not know who is targeted. It might simply be that this will be those who are already renting out a room getting a tax break which was not necessary because they were already getting a break in terms of the money they were taking in as an income.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Their concerns had already been raised to the Minister from people like St. Brelade's College that it was acting as a disincentive for people to rent out their rooms because they were taxed for doing so.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Okay, so this was for the students of the college.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I mentioned that already, yes, yes.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

As an example.



**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

As one example, okay.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I think it is quite clear, Minister, that it already exists.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

People rent out rooms in their houses, whether they declare it for tax purposes or not is up to them. But for those who do it is quite clear that you are just enhancing a system which exists and we accept that you are not creating something new.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct, correct, yes, yes.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

On the same token, have you got any more there, Deputy? We might move on to one size and it all comes to ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

No, it was about safeguarding, I think you tried to address that. What about the concerns that are raised by some groups, if I may, because I think it is really important, about those who may be coming out of care? There is a line in the proposition that talks about those coming out of specific organisations. Is really renting a room in someone else's home the best process there?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is a tricky question to ask, is it not? Surely these people coming out of care will be going through our Social Security systems, will they not?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I am afraid I have not got the line in front of me.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Care leavers surely will be looked after, will have wraparound services on them. I do not ...

**Associate Director of Social Security, Population and Housing Policy:**

Care leavers have significant supports around them and they, I imagine, will be placed in this ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, they do but ...

**Associate Director of Social Security, Population and Housing Policy:**

We talked about family and friends and they might be quite appropriate but I mean it would all depend but that is absolutely not, this scheme is not only care leavers at all and the message ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

But this is the issue, it is not aimed at anybody, it is a blanket.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

But it never has been, it has always existed.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, but you are giving a further tax incentive for something that is not targeted without, I think, any real clear picture of what the improvement will be, apart from what it might be; it would be easier to find worker accommodation, it might be.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

As has already been stated here, we are trying to make better use of existing properties and create additional income; that is what we are trying to do. At the end of the day we recognise there is insufficient ... we know there is insufficient accommodation, that is why we are building thousands of homes at the moment. We are going to talk about right-sizing later on here, if we can use property more effectively, surely that is the right thing to do on this Island, otherwise we end up building on green fields and I ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

No, I am sorry, Minister, I cannot accept that complete link.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, okay. There is a link ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

A single room for somebody to rent is not the same as a home ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, but you pick on one room, what if it is 10 rooms, what if it is 20 rooms? We are talking into ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

That is the future of housing in Jersey, people living in individual rooms in a shared house.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, no, no, I am not asking them to live in ... no, what I am just saying is that if we do not use our accommodation more efficiently and more effectively the direct consequence of that is more building. If we run out of space in St. Helier, as the Constable has recently made a commentary about, we end up building on green fields.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

One final thing then, when you get the first set of data of the uptake of this, what will you see as successful?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Good question, a really good question.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I asked it.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, I know, I know. The answer to that is I would like to think we see less demand, businesses being able to find that they have more people applying for jobs, which are all jobs that they are currently struggling to find anybody to ...

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I think, Minister, that is potentially the only way you are going to see it because, as the officer has already said ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We do not know, through tax.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

... in creating a new sector that does not need to be declared to tax, the taxman is not going to find out about it. If somebody is renting out a room for £8,000 or £9,000 or whatever it is there will not be a declaration anymore. Even the taxman is not going to know if they are honest or ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think we just recognise this is not going to solve the housing problem.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

No.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

This is not going to solve employment problems. It is a little bit ...

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

It is just a little bit of help to try to encourage ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

One little piece of the jigsaw in the wider scheme of things. I think that is what we have just got to keep in perspective.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay. Let us move on to right-sizing then because that is a good time to do it.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Minister, in your ministerial plan one of your priorities is: "To deliver more homes for Islanders while making use of the homes we already have, including policies to support right-sizing." Could you provide us an update as to the status of work being completed on right-sizing in Jersey, please?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay. We are developing policies in endeavouring to find out how we can ... as I say, we already, through Andium, through our social housing networks, endeavour to do right-sizing in that area, try and put people in appropriate sized accommodation. Our challenge is in the private sector with an ageing demographic. Our challenge is people who have ... their children have flown the nest and they no longer require the size of property that they live in. The question is, how do we get them out of that ... sorry, it is not a case of getting them out of that property, if they decide they would like to move into a smaller property, what are the mechanisms that we, as a Government, enable them to do to be able to do that? Again, that is something we are trying to work out as mechanisms. There are 2 areas, one is finding appropriate housing in the parishes in which they live, which is a

massive challenge for us at the moment in terms of trying to find smaller units of accommodation because lots of people do not want to move out of their parish, they want to stay within their community. That is an area which is currently being worked on. But our challenge is, how do we free up that property in some way, shape or form and let it go? How can we incentivise people to move out? Do you want to say something on that at all a bit more, Natasha?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Okay, I think it is part of the wider package of policies that are helping Islanders to make better use of the homes that we have on the Island. Much like the policy we were just talking about in terms of rent-a-room, we know we have an increasing pattern of under-occupation in Jersey, that is concerning because it means it is putting a great deal of pressure on the Island to build more homes when it would be fine to wait to make best use of the homes we already have. That will ease the pressure without having to develop as many homes as might otherwise be needed. The key thing here is it is not about forcing people out of their homes, it is about recognising what barriers are existing for them to right-size or to rent a room and to just support Islanders in making choices that benefit the wider community.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Have you got any policies? Because obviously I can appreciate what you are talking about but we have not got anything that we are doing.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

A survey was undertaken last year to ask Islanders if they wanted to right-size and if they did what were the barriers to do doing so? We learnt from that there were things like stamp duty was discouraging people because that is an upfront fee that needs to be paid. We are thinking about how we can best support Islanders but I think we hear you that any tax relief or incentive needs to be appropriately targeted and there is a reality that when people move out of their homes they generate a significant revenue from that home. The balance has to be very carefully achieved and, ultimately, the end goal that a home is released back into the market. That is really challenging because what we also heard from the survey is people want to right-size but they do not necessarily want to relinquish the property that they live in; they might want to keep hold of that property and wait for their children to grow up. We must make sure that any policy we do develop does not have an unintended consequence that we end up with, let us say, more vacant homes or people having financial benefits of moving out of their home without giving the benefit back to the community in terms of releasing the home for occupation by a family. It is a very complicated policy to get to the bottom of.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Question then, should we be looking at building smaller homes, as opposed to larger ones then?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think we already are, we have already been building significant numbers of one-bedroom and 2-bedroom flats, so ...

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Stop you right there.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Go on.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

People who have a 3-bedroom house with a garden do not want a small apartment and this is fundamentally the problem. We are asking people to downsize and I fully support that but we cannot be asking somebody to downsize into a small one-bedroom flat. I think that is part of the problem.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Some people will find that acceptable but I take your point. But that is my point about the community, staying within the communities. That is where there is a solution there and this is where we have to work with the parishes to come up with ideas on that front.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Other things that we learnt from the survey is that people generally want a one or 2-bedroom bungalow with a small amount of outside space. I think we can agree that being put into flats is not necessarily what people want. They want the enjoyment of space and a scaled-down version of the amenities that they currently have in their home. Constable Jackson had an amendment to the Bridging Island Plan that included a right-sizing element to our housing-mix policy for all new housing developments in Jersey and that is making sure that we consider scaled-down units, the one and 2-bed units in all housing developments in Jersey to give a range of different housing types. It is not just the recent housing sites, it is not just flat development in town, it is all larger-scale developments over 5 units have to consider how they are going to accommodate right-sizing opportunities. From that we should get a range of stock that will give people more choice.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Given the pressure on green fields though, you mentioned the word bungalow but I think both sides of the equation are going to have to accept that bungalows in today's development world are not

acceptable anymore, otherwise we will cover the whole Island in bungalows. There needs to be a certain amount of first floor, second floor.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is right. I think that is why I think it is important the parishes work with this because obviously parish schemes in Trinity and St. John are ongoing at the moment.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I think the question has already been answered but in the data you received from your survey, was there a typical unit that was the most sought after?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I think it is the one and 2-bed bungalows with an outdoor space that has an element of maintenance as part of the package. We asked them, what are the characteristics of the home that you would really like to live in? Yes, that did come out on top. The details are published online.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I just ask, do you have examples of the bad examples of right-sizing that you have learnt from? Sometimes when you build it tends to be older, dare I say, people and I will use the word over 55 now ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Be careful when you say ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Be careful using that word, have to be careful myself now, that would be asked to downsize. Sometimes perhaps if they are in the centre of town in the wrong area it can be a real difficulty, I have dealt with some issues myself where it was a mistake to have those places there.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I think it is very well recognised the right-sizing opportunities need to recognise the needs of older people in particular and that is about keeping people within their existing communities, for example, where they may have family links and friends. To keep them integrated it is about making sure they are close to amenities and making sure that they feel safe. We know that many older people will not feel safe in a more urban environment. That goes back to the point that right-sizing opportunities, I think, are not just about a right-sizing product or policy, it is about providing a range of homes and choice in the housing market that will enable people to feel like they are able to downsize into a property that they will be happy and comfortable living in.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

That is the second time you have used family and friends because we used the phrase when we were talking about the single room and the tax breaks. Maybe that is a direction of travel that one needs to publicise more where somebody who cannot necessarily find somewhere suitable to downsize but may have rooms available for wider family to move in with them and they would feel a level of security, they would not be concerned. Then maybe a small family moving back into a larger home then frees up a home somewhere else for somebody else.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Another home, yes, yes. As you say, there are many different ideas around that, yes.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

But I think also it has got to be not only about people having an ability to downsize if they are in the rental type markets but it is about people being able to downsize within buying markets. Because I fully accept that the parishes all have various facilities for people to rent but very few, unfortunately, to buy and that is where I think part of our problem arises. Because obviously somebody has got a home that they are going to sell, so they want to buy something else and that is, from my perspective, what I have seen across the Island is that you have got facilities for people to stay within their communities if they are renting but not if they are buying.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Buying, right, okay.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Actions on vacant properties, have there been vacant properties identified since the production of the *Action on Vacant Properties* report? If so, how many and what action do you propose taking to return those properties to active use when appropriate to do so?

[12:15]

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay. As of today, what do we have today, as we walked out the building today? I think as of yesterday we had 40, okay, we had 40 homes - before we had even publicised this - around the Island. As of today, following publicity of yesterday, I think we are up to 60/70 homes. It is quite remarkable how many people ... these are not duplicates. It was suggested there may be duplications here, none of this is duplication; these are all homes now. The challenge, as you correctly identify here, is what is the next step, what is after that? I think what we are going to do is



we are going to wait until about June time, give it 6 months, see what comes forward. We are obviously offering advice to people as well. It is not just a case of gathering information from people, we are trying to unlock these homes. One of the senses is that there are people who are what we call asset-rich, cash-poor and just do not know what to do. The other thing which we have identified in a meeting with the Bankers Association and that is about individuals who have homes who do not get any enjoyment out of them as well. How can we get some equity-release products out there? There is a kind of a whole plethora of ideas that can be used. If we get to the point where nobody wants to move at all and just say go away, Minister, we are going to just leave this vacant, then I think we then have to use other powers. There are areas which are in the Minister for the Environment's portfolio, which is about how dangerous is the ... what is the exact term used?

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Dangerous and dereliction and stuff like that.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Dilapidated buildings.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Dilapidated buildings, yes, orders and things, so we have that and then we can go on. It is literally we can ratchet it up as much as we want. But what I am very heartened by is the response that we have had in terms of collecting ... I banged on for 6 months about data, we have had no data on any of this. We have started out with a figure of 4,000 homes, originally vacant homes apparently. We have got that number down to 900. It is going to be really interesting over the next few months to see where that number goes to. But I am really, really pleased at the positive way in which the community have sort of kind of galvanised to a degree to try and identify this. Because I think everybody is sick and tired of empty homes which have been vacant for many, many years, just sitting there rotting away and really just doing nothing for the environment. We are seeing young families leave the Island. What is the alternative after that? We talked about building on green fields. We have to build more homes within St. Helier. It is just with all those things that we are having to do and yet we have all of this property which is just not being utilised appropriately.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Can I just flag something? When you said about the ability to release equity, what we have seen here is a number of U.K. (United Kingdom) companies doing equity release, which means that those properties are no longer owned by people within the Island. What will we do to prevent that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

At the moment the banks do not offer that service here locally at all. What I am keen to do is to find out what the appetite is on the local market, if there is any appetite to do that or whether it is even an appropriate product. As I say, right now we need to work that out more.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

One quick question on that, is that not something that the States could do because then they could gradually take control ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, absolutely and I absolutely agree with you. That is why if there is no appetite in the private sector then maybe it is something that we should be doing, as you say the States, and there are laws already there, obviously States loans and various things like that which we can use. There is infrastructure in place in that way.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

You are waiting the 6 months, Minister, and you will have some data at the end of that.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

But could you just run over again what work is continuing when it comes to vacant property during that 6 months? I presume you are not just going to do nothing until the end of the 6 months.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Would you like me to describe what we have been doing?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Go on, you carry on, carry on.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

The *Action on Vacant Properties* report that was published towards the end of last year contains 6 key actions that the Minister is undertaking this year. We are pleased to report that all 6 of those actions are now well underway. Yesterday we saw the launch of the Empty Homes Service that was committed to be launched by the end of the month. In that includes a community self-reporting system, so very easy to use, a web app system where somebody can plot the location of the empty home that they found. They can tell us a bit about the condition, they can post a photo if they like and that comes through to the Empty Homes Service. As the Minister alluded, in the first few hours

we have had around 20 cases come through already and that is before our active operation of that has gone out.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

It is like report an empty home?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, yes.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

But are you going to do anything with that individual data, for example, before the 6 months is up?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Absolutely. As part of the commitments of the *Action and Vacant Properties* report, we now have a member of staff. You will know that there is some budget allocated in the Government Plan to deal with vacant homes. We do have some staff resource dedicated to providing that advice and guidance to Islanders. We will undertake a case review on all properties that are brought to our attention to understand a bit more as to why they might be empty, if we can establish the owner, if we can reach out to the owner and offer some direct advice and support if they have not already reached out to us. Because there is a second way for people to get in touch, if they want the help and they are ready to come forward to us to get that help, there is a dedicated website on gov.je where it provides advice to homeowners. As the Minister also mentioned, before even launching the service as a result of the forms that were sent out with the parish rates this year, that generated 40 individual enquiries for advice. Another purpose of that report was to collect numbers, not to provide advice but people were very clearly interested in seeing what they could do about their empty homes. Going forward we will be developing law drafting instructions this year to deal with a full change to the rates law that will enable this information to be collected properly through the parish rates system and ideally shared with the Government, but of course we will have to deal with that specific data-sharing issue when we get to the law drafting. Beyond that the commitment to publish the 6-month report is with purpose, that is not only to let people know how the service is getting on and the success or not, as the case may be, as we are seeing but also it is the opportunity for the Minister to identify what he is going to do about the other actions that were identified in that report as remaining under consideration. That is potential development of empty dwelling management orders which would give specific controls to the Minister to acquire an empty home and bring it back into use or in worst case the consideration of compulsory purchase powers, which would be really coming from the cases that we are seeing come forward now and if there is any necessity for that there.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I was going to ask, if you do not mind, what the timescale might be before those type of actions are going to be taken because we could spend 2 or 3 years collecting advice and information ...

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

We are providing advice immediately ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, but that could go on while you decide ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Personally, after 6 months I think that will give us a heads up, a sight line if what we are doing is effective or having an impact. I am as keen as anybody to see that first home being brought back into the housing stock. Absolutely for me it is an urgent, urgent issue and it has been hanging around for, I do not know, I would say since God was a boy but that is probably an underestimation, it is a long time.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

The timescale in your mind before compulsory purchase or an empty property tax or any of these more ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Draconians. Again, it is a ratcheting up, so after 6 months we see where we are at. We then go, okay, so what is the next thing we need to do? We have identified X number of properties, which clearly need the Minister for the Environment to take a look at and see what he has got to do. I think we just ratchet it up from there. If that works on a cohort and that starts to trigger ... my humble opinion is that we will end up with a situation whereby once we start triggering events to happen I think that will be the key to success.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

You do not see the need for the more draconian measures.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Some more draconian measures. Something like a blanket tax, for instance. We recognised, as I said, that there are people who are asset-rich, cash-poor, we slap a big tax on them and say you have got to do something about that; that is not very helpful from their point of view. We have to be much more targeted in our approach in this scenario.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

There will be some financial incentives for those people to do that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That would be my gut feeling; that would be my gut feeling, yes.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Just sort of a couple of final parts on this particular thing about vacant properties, it says that you promote and support the role of States-owned entities to purchase and redevelop those vacant properties.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, yes.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Can you outline exactly what work has been done with those State-owned entities to date?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Both States-owned entities are able to acquire land for redevelopment. There is a good example of Andium with this before the Minister's initiative, in Colomberie where there were some derelict and empty homes they brought them up to the decent home standard and they are now occupied by social housing tenants. There are existing precedents with our States-owned entities to find opportunities to either bring homes back into use or more often than not redevelopment opportunities. There may be larger sites that present an opportunity to develop more homes. It will not necessarily be about bringing the home back into use but it may also be about making better use of the land that an empty property may be on.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I am going to ask a radical question because I feel in the mood today. What about the States-owned properties, their own, which are all derelict?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I will leave you with that one.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, as you say, I am not quite sure we know exactly how many States-owned properties are derelict at this moment in time. One thing we are actively looking at with regard to a property that is owned by Jersey Property Holdings, for instance, is around key workers and I think the management of that. There is quite a body of work going on about whether the States themselves should continue to have these homes, whether it be in Health or it be in Education, et cetera and they should be centrally managed. Again, my opinion - I have given you my opinion on these things, it is not States policy yet - I think there is an opportunity for someone like Andium to take over that portfolio and to manage these properties, these individual properties and then in some way work with key workers or the various service providers, so whether it be Education and putting packages together for key workers. I think there is quite a body of work to do there but I recognise that I do not know that the States of Jersey are very good at managing their own assets.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

This is just my opinion, you have just given yours.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, thank you.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

My opinion is that, as a Government, if we are going to be telling people to deal with their vacant properties we should set an example and do the same.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

It would be interesting to see how many States-owned properties are reported to the Empty Homes Service.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

It will.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

The Minister will be in touch with the Minister for Infrastructure to discuss those properties.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Before we move on I think it would not take a rocket scientist to work out that La Folie will be one that is duplicated a number of times on your list, Minister. It is quite disgraceful really that such a structure or an area is left undeveloped for such a long period of time.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Of course that is one of the challenges, this is under the Ports Authority, which is obviously an arm's length organisation ...

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

It is State-owned.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, it is State-owned, yes, but they have big plans right now being put in place at the moment, have they not, which includes the redevelopment of that area? I think that is ...

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I know and that is a good answer, Minister, but I think we have all seen a number of iterations of big plans for La Folie, which over the years have not come to fruition. It would be wonderful if they could.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I would like to think this Government will deliver on that point.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

There is a wider regeneration consideration here for town. There are a number of empty properties in town, the St. Saviour's Road area, for example, where I could not even count how many properties are currently empty. That is as a result of development opportunities at Gas Place, I am not going into submissions there, and sites such as the Brewery site where there are homes remaining in a very sad state. It is really important that the Government helps to bring these sites forward because for as long as they are sitting empty or pending planning permission being granted, it is not going to be helping our endeavour to bring vacant homes back into ...

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Strangely enough, and I hear exactly what you are saying, I believe that there will be something shortly for the Brewery site. But in many ways it is the individual properties are almost as important in this as the mass large schemes which will deliver hundreds of flats, one-bed or 2-bed flats, whereas some of these empty homes are genuinely that. They are 2, 3, 4-bedroom terraced houses that would be ideal for families, whereas one-bed and 2-beds are not as appropriate. Anyway, okay, I would like one quick question on homelessness, Minister, and then I am just going to go to some mutual recommendations. You gave us a new definition back in October, just very briefly, can you outline what plans you had under the heading of homelessness coming up in 2023?

[12:30]

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay. Right now I think by the end of March I asked for a report at the end of first quarter to come back to me on that, to see what had been identified. Because I keep coming back to the data, we do not have a heads up on the data in this area and so right now C.L.S. are looking at providing or capturing that data for me. Then upon knowing the scale of the issue ... I mean this has implications around Gateway, Gateway demand and how far we open that. There are lots of other issues which come down the track but we need to understand the scale of the issue at this moment in time and I will not be able to give you a scale right now until, as I say, the end of the first quarter.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, we will put that ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay, I will have to park that, so hopefully next meeting we will be able to give you more on that.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

No, no, that is fine, we will put that on the list and you can be sure we will bring it back in the next quarter.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am sure, I am sure.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I just want to deal briefly or relatively briefly, Minister, with recommendations that you have acted on from the previous panel, Environment Panel, specifically to do with affordable housing. There was a recommendation that you should ensure that the data on different types of housing is suitably anonymously captured in order to inform existing future housing need. Have we done any work in that area?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay, can you help me with this one?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, absolutely.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, thank you, thank you.



**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I think the Housing Advice Service is just one part of the data that will be collected and that embraces the homelessness issue and also Gateway enquiries that are made into the Housing Advice Service. The really important information that we are all looking forward to receiving is the Statistics Jersey's publication for future housing needs. That publication follows after the population projections, so we are expecting population projections to be modelled off of the 2021 census by the end of this year. Once that is done then the housing needs projections will be issued. Those projections are based on the Jersey opinions and lifestyle survey, so they are an anonymous portrait of housing needs across the Island for this statistic base; that is a really important report. The last time we had it was in 2019 and that gives us a real understanding of the type of homes that Islanders are looking for and need in the coming years.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

That is interesting because one of the other recommendations concern the Draft Bridging Island Plan and making sure that homes built on our proposed sites are flexible enough to give us the right-sizing options that we have spoken about before. Are you content that those plans that we have seen thus far have enough flexibility?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I would hope so. I know there is an awful lot of work done about trying to keep the value of land down, depressed so that we would get access to it for first-home buyers. So how do we manage land values? We have seen some crazy prices paid for uplifts on a field being bought by a developer for a huge sum of money. One of our challenges is, how do we make sure that we do not scare people, we just simply are building unaffordable homes? I know Natasha has done a huge amount of work in this area of trying to square the circle, I think is the term one would use because it is a massive challenge in that area.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

That is right and the younger you are the more challenging it is with the cost of housing at the moment.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, exactly.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

That was another recommendation, we will not leave that one behind. What about identifying changing aspirations and expectations in housing demand? How do you monitor how the demand is changing?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Again, that report that we are looking forward to receiving from Statistics Jersey is going to be a good insight for us as to how demand is changing. There are 2 types of demand assessment, there is one that is objective, which we model off of population characteristics and that is how you match your housing supply relative to objective need, so if everyone was right size and if the population continued to have the characteristics it has today. Taking the objective analysis with what people want, they quite often say 2 very different things. We were talking earlier about people wanting the bungalow with the garden and the spare bedroom and the parking, a real challenge in planning is kind of arbitrating between those conflicting needs, the objective need and the desires of the population. In Jersey we have finite lands and, therefore, we need to think harder and work harder to make living in smaller homes in more urban areas more attractive to people. It is not just about providing the homes themselves, it is about providing the places, so we must really focus on improving that for Islanders.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Are you doing any work in trying to make sure that in this construction industry we are encouraging more people into apprenticeships, into development opportunities within the industry? Is that outside of your remit?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is outside, I do not get involved in that. I guess that would be the Economic ...

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

We do as far as the construction sector innovation hub is concerned, that is something that is being promoted by the Minister and by the Council of Ministers but, equally, that is ...

**Associate Director of Social Security, Population and Housing Policy:**

Skills as a general theme is, again, a very strong theme of the Council of Ministers, so that is skills for the future, the future needs of the Island and that obviously includes construction, in particular skills within modern methods of construction techniques to make sure people have been learning how to make the best use of modern techniques.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, Deputy Ward has got a question about build-to-rent, which is an interesting subject.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, it was recommendation G7 from, I believe, the same previous panel's report: "The Minister for the Environment, in conjunction with the Minister for Housing and Communities, are asked to investigate further whether build-to-rent is a suitable development investment model for Jersey to pursue and, if so, whether Government should incentivise and promote this model." Can you confirm what has been investigated and is this something that Government is going to pursue?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

As far as I am aware, no, at this moment in time, if I am honest with you. As I say, I think we are building in the model that we are building, which is like shared equity schemes and those kind of areas. I think the build-to-rent, as far as I am concerned, has not crossed my path at this moment in time. It is not on my radar as something which is a high priority into my ministerial unit.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Do you think that might be - I do not know the word - seepage?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Go on, go on, yes, yes.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

That is the only word that comes to mind, by the back door, that is what is happening. Because homes being built are simply unaffordable for so many, particularly young people and so, therefore, they are being bought by investors and inevitably become ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Landlords and they become tenants and they are lifelong renters.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

There is a sort of backdoor ... the backdoor incentive is, effectively, the way the market is because it is unaffordable.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

You can argue that but I think one of the policies which we are currently developing right now is we have this ring-fenced sum of money, this £10 million. What we are trying to establish is, is there a mechanism that we can use which will assist purchase for people who struggle to find the deposit they need to get on the housing ladder? Are there mechanisms that we can do? What we have to be very, very careful of is if we let £10 million out into the market that is a significant sum of money

which will materially affect the housing market and not in a good way. We believe it could just drive house prices upwards because more people suddenly can find they can get on the housing ladder. We have to release that funding in a controlled way. Exactly how we do that, that is something which we are working on right now but we will definitely for sure have some mechanism in place. For me it is in the next 6 months; that is where I am at at the moment on that one. But I think home ownership is my sort of way forward in all of this.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

If I could just step in.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, please do, of course.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Finding large chunks of money to assist in the housing market, in the rental market in the care sector is a great Government initiative. I hope you are going to agree, Minister, that it really is important that we do exactly like you have just mentioned, we make sure that an increase in Government spending does not result in more money, more profit, more pressure on the housing.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It is not going to be a clean thing to be able to do. I think what we have to recognise is that whatever we do to facilitate purchasing will have a degree of inflationary impact in housing, in home prices. But the question is, how much can we tolerate? I think that is the \$64 million question in all of that. We know we will create a little bit of inflation but will that be a tolerable amount of inflation in order to achieve more home ownership? That is a ...

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

But getting back to the initial question about build-to-rent, is that a way of I would not say reducing the cost of housing but reducing the pressure a bit so that the intensity comes out, the heat comes out of the market where you will build a number of homes and have no intention of putting them on the open ... these are specifically for people, for families to rent?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct, yes. Do you want to say something?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

If I may, Andium Homes are doing exactly that, they have a programme to build 3,000 homes by 2030. They have got about 1,800 homes in the pipeline.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Is that a range of homes or will that be in a specific size range?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Most of their development opportunities at the moment are in town, so that is focusing on flat development but that is also where the identified demand is for Gateway. Into the longer term Andium are naturally very keen to find opportunities through the rezoned housing sites, which would then rebalance the provision of more family homes. Their focus at the moment is quite rightly on the provision of smaller homes because that is where the demand is.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I think we can move on to the Affordable Housing Gateway because it leads in nicely with those homes being built. Can I just say I am very pleased that we have all started to use the word homes and not properties? I have seen a shift during this meeting ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay, yes, good, good.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

... because I think it is a really important integral part of what we are talking about. You announced in December 2022 you are increasing the income insurance for those applying to the Affordable Gateway to bring it in line with income support. What has the response been to that area so far?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Do you know what, I wish I could have that data because the data is being released to me today or yesterday I should say? I can let you have that information. As far as we are aware, there has been a significant increase in activity in our Customer and Local Services in that area. But we do not know if that is all to do with the Gateway being opened up or whether that is other activities. We are aware - and I will just point this out - the cost of living is an issue. The rate of inflation for people is becoming unaffordable, so there is more activity than there has been or I would say unprecedented activity in the C.L.S. area at this moment in time. But, as I say, as to what proportion of that is to do with the Gateway or other areas I am not sure at this moment in time but I am more than happy to share that data as soon as we have that available to give you.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

To carry on with that, that increase in demand within the publication notes on the change you recognise that a widening access to the Gateway would increase demand. However, you state that

Andium Homes are on track to build 3,000 new properties - we just mentioned, I will call them homes - by 2023. What progress in future developments are in the pipeline? Where are we with those 3,000, is the first question, to meet that demand? Because opening up the Gateway is a good thing but ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, yes. No, no, but we do not have the homes for people to go to, that is right. The problem when you see the numbers on the Gateway is we have just got to be careful about what we identify as new demand, as opposed to internal transfers. About 50 per cent of the numbers on here are what we call internal transfers, they are not new people looking for new homes, as it were. Right now we are building ... we are going to have Ann Court released. I am trying to think of the new name it has been given ...

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Edinburgh ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Cyril Le Marquand Court, thank you, thank you, well spotted. Okay, and we have also got the La Collette Low-Rise, which is Edinburgh House, that is coming on stream and they are going to be fully functional by June of this year, okay.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

How many is that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

To give you an idea, Edinburgh House is 147 homes, the Cyril Le Marquand or Ann Court is 165 new homes.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Are they mainly one and 2 bedroom?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

They are mainly one and 2 bedroom, yes.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Are they entirely one and 2 bedroom?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Not entirely, I do believe there is a few 3 bedrooms but the reality is the main demand on the Gateway is one and 2.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

This goes really back to the right-sizing policy issues that we were talking about earlier. Much of the demand on the one and 2 beds, a band of the Gateway, is coming from people under-occupying 3-bed homes. By providing those homes you are making available more 3-bed homes because you are helping people to right-size. Andium are particularly conscious of the opportunity presented to them to get on and help their own tenants to right-size by providing the opportunities in the one-bed and 2 bed ...

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

It is all in the rental market, is it not? It is all within the rental market.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

The rental market, yes, that is right.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

It is within the social housing market, yes, that is correct.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

It is something we could have asked before, Minister, but do Andium have a policy for people that they know should be right-sizing and they refuse to?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think they probably do but we do not have that written ... I am not familiar with exactly what that policy is and how they operate that policy.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I can confirm, so they do not ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It could be around rent, they could have used the rent policy.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, yes, okay. They do not currently have a policy, we have been having conversations with them about that. Just as we were talking before about right-sizing, it is a sensitive issue; these are people's homes. We need to think very carefully how we go about right-sizing social housing tenants

who may have lived in homes for decades. I think what the Minister was referring to was how the income support system operates and that the benefit provided for rent matches your need. If you are under-occupying you may not have your rent fully covered, that then becomes the incentive to right-size to make sure that your rent is fully covered.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, I just wanted to go back to something else you said just now, Minister, which was about Ann Court. Did you say that Ann Court will be on line this year?

[12:45]

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It already is, I think a third of it at least now is already let ... it is already occupied I should say.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay. That is very good news because the Planning Committee were ...

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I did not look like it was liveable when I saw it last week.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, the back end of it, the Mayfair side of it is already occupied, yes, yes.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Okay, all right.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

A couple of things and I think I will finish and now I will take a leaf out of Deputy Le Hegarat's book to ask the question. One of the issues, one of the massive issues we have got is for young people looking for a one-bedroom flat, which seem to be going at the moment at around £1,300 a month for a one bedroom. If you are young, just starting out in the world it is simply not affordable or it is 50 per cent, 60 per cent of your income. Could the Gateway be one way to enable these younger people to have an affordable home, thus stay on the Island, thus perhaps be able to look later on at buying by getting money together? If so, is that something you are looking at and planning for and trying to incorporate? Because we are facing a real issue for young people, who are simply not staying.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**



I totally agree with you, I totally agree with you. I think one of the things about that is, how do we establish demand level, okay, on that? We obviously have various bands within the Gateway at the moment. One of the things we do not surface very well is what that wider demand is. In other words, encouraging people who do not meet the eligibility criteria right now, is how do we make sure we capture that data in a sensible way so that we can understand the scale of the issue? I keep coming back to it, we need to identify the scale of the issue. Once we identify the scale of the issue, what do we need to do? How do we facilitate something to go? What mechanism enables us to allow them to get into a more affordable status? As you said, it comes back to what could Government do to facilitate that and make things easier? The problem I have is I do not know the size of the problem. We have got lots of anecdotal evidence, okay, and that is the problem. One person will say this and one person will say that but what we need is proper collected data. I think one of the big things we are going to be doing and this will be ... I keep trying to give timeframes to my poor team around here but there is an urgency to try and find out that information, that level of demand.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can I just ask, sorry, in regards to the Gateway?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, yes.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

There is an age limit, is there?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

There is an age limit at the moment which comes out at 45.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Forty-five, you see there are ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Forty, sorry.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Is there any ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I would like to get it down to 25, okay.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I think that is essential because there is a whole section of our community that are leaving.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I absolutely agree with you but, again, we just have to be careful how we open that Gateway up because some people ...

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

But is that not the only way that you are going to be able to collect that data to open it up and then see who applies? But realistically I would say ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, I get that. But what we do not want to be doing is giving people ... sort of hang that carrot out there and go we are going to be able to provide you with a home when we physically cannot.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, but at the moment the problem is that there is no carrot, there is nothing.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I agree with you.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Sometimes it is the Wild West out there when they are trying to find somewhere.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is what we need to establish that information in a much clearer way.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

If I may, I think that there are different ways to think about this. The Gateway is a list but that list is defined by eligibility to join the list, so it is not a comprehensive picture of demand. I hope you do not mind me saying, Minister, but we have been in conversations about how we address that issue. I think we can do it better where people can join the list, they can let us know their need. They can maintain their relationship with Customer and Local Services and Customer and Local Services can improve their service for these people by keeping them up to date as to when they do become eligible.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Just sorry to go on but I think one of the very important things is it is not just about cost, although that is a hugely important thing. It is about security of tenure, it is about the quality of the home. It is about the expectations on them and so forth. In the absence of sometimes tenancy law not being enacted because people are worried or whatever, I think a social housing provider does give greater, hopefully, assurance to people and that is another element that is really important.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That comes back to the R.T.L. 2023-2024 law being fit for purpose for the modern era and the urgency of that law being brought forward.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Can I just ask quickly? You mentioned something about like the downsizing within Andium and I do not know how much work you do or do not do or speak to in relation to Andium. But certainly something that has been highlighted to me in recent weeks is the fact that if I choose to downsize from a 3-bed home, potentially, I then end up with a new contract. That contract means I go into a new property and my rent goes up. Why would I want to swap a 3-bed to a one-bed and still be paying more? I think fundamentally and I have spoken to people who ... effectively people are frightened to move because their rent is going to go up because the property is newer. Some of these things need to be addressed as to what people can afford. Because we all know that rental, whether it is through Andium or privately, is not cheap. It is not cheap rent. It can be quite substantial and it has been a surprise to me how substantial some of the rents are within some of our social housing providers. I think the thing is that if you want people to move then there has to be some incentive somewhere that I do not think we are doing.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Just to confirm that is the nature of the conversations that we have been having. It is very clearly the barrier that has been identified. Of course there are implications for making a policy decision like that, particularly with the financial implications to Andium, it needs to very carefully considered.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Any spend on that could be very, very targeted, could it not?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, absolutely.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Certainly more targeted than rent-a-room.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Minister, it is clear that your new Residential Tenancy Law is going to be a very important document.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Totally, totally agree with that.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

We look forward to the White Paper, 4 to 6 weeks. That will be before we meet you again for our next quarterly hearing.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

I thank you for your attendance this morning. If the panel members do not have any other questions?

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

No.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

No, I think we have done enough.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

We said we would try and finish before 1.00 p.m. and we have succeeded, so ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It only feels like half an hour.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

You can have a lunchbreak today.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Time flies when you are having fun.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Thank you for coming in this morning and we will see you again soon.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No problem at all, my pleasure, my pleasure.

**Deputy S.G. Luce:**

Thank you very much.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Thank you very much indeed, thank you for your time as well.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Thank you.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Thank you very much.

[12:51]