

4. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Housing

4.1 Deputy A. Breckon:

I wonder if the Minister could explain to the House his definition of what “sheltered housing” is.

Senator T.J. Le Main (The Minister for Housing):

Yes, Sir. Sheltered housing is for retired people or people coming up to middle age who are in severe difficulty medically or physically and it is providing homes that will meet their needs for the remainder of their days. It is homes that can accommodate their medical and physical needs and to effectively try to place them back into the community where they have lived all their lives and to have some help and assistance from families and children who may wish to look after their parents. A sheltered home is that kind of home.

4.2 Deputy I.J. Gorst:

In light of Sir David King’s lecture yesterday, can the Minister confirm when solar panels, rainwater capture units and other energy efficient devices will be fitted to all States’ new-builds and refurbishments as standard?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The current situation is that in the last few days the architects have been appointed for the redevelopment of Le Squez. There have been several master plans over the years on Le Squez. Currently, the scheme is being overseen by my Assistant Minister, Deputy Hilton, working very closely, as she will be, with the Parish Deputies and the Constable of St. Clement and other interested parties and it will be an eco-friendly scheme which, hopefully, will incorporate all those kinds of issues. Might I say that all the future planning applications with regard to sheltered housing hopefully will be a joint initiative between both sides, that is the Housing Department who do know the needs of the people and the Connétables and anybody else.

4.3 Deputy S. Power:

Could the Minister give the Assembly an update of the latest assessment of sheltered housing needs for the Island and would he give an indication of his knowledge of the waiting lists in St. Peter and St. Brelade for demand for the type of retirement cottages that are currently about 15 years old at Don Farm?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The current need right now is around 400 units of sheltered accommodation and in fact in the last month, 28 have been added on to our list and the list is being added to on a weekly and a monthly basis. It just seems that people are living so much longer now and the medical needs are proving to some people that the current kind of accommodation is of real concern to them. In fact, one-bedroom unit sheltered housing is our biggest need at the current time. As regards to the St. Brelade and St. Peter area, it is our biggest issue at the present time and in fact the Planning Minister and I are coming forward with proposals to the first phase of sheltered housing in the Parishes which will be those recommended by the Connétables. I have to say, Sir, that the current recommendations for St. Brelade on the first phase and St. Peter only produces 12 units of accommodation and perhaps 18 on Les Quennevais. I can say to you, Sir, that it is the biggest demand we have and currently the Don Farm bungalows - which is sheltered accommodation for people in St. Brelade who want to enable to live close to families to have assistance - we could fill 100 times over at the present time. There is a real desperate need and I shall be seeking with the Planning Minister to come to this Assembly with Field 139 which is an H4 site for sheltered housing and downsizing. It really is very serious at the moment.

The Bailiff:

Minister, may I, again, ask you please to be concise? There are a number of Members who wish to ask you questions.

4.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Has the Minister noted, and what action will he take, on the comments contained in the *EDAW Report* that a shortfall may occur within category B housing if the qualifications are reduced to 10 years and demand for immigrant housing exceeds 200 households per annum which looks likely? What measures is he going to take to avoid this increase in immigrants?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Quite honestly, Sir, at the present time, there is an overall shortage of properties between £400,000 and £800,000; a huge shortage. There is a huge shortage all across the market at the present time but, currently, over the period of years that qualifications have been reduced year by year, the situation of giving housing qualifications to people who have built-up the years in residence has not exacerbated the overall housing situation. These people are Jersey people now that have contributed and are contributing in paying taxes. There is a real difficulty in category B homes and I am not sure that it is I that should be pursuing category B homes but certainly with the discussions and the weekly...

The Bailiff:

Minister, thank you. You are time expired please.

4.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the Minister's excellent initiative regarding sheltered housing, which I do praise, could the Minister please tell us to what extent the private sector will be sharing the burden with the public sector and could he tell us, Sir, what will happen to people who, for example, cannot show a Parish affiliation and cannot get access to a Parish estate? Thirdly, Sir, could he tell us how will the criteria be... **[Laughter]** for the big estate planned in St. Saviour?

The Bailiff:

One at a time, please.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I can assure the Deputy and Members that we met the Scrutiny Officers yesterday in regard to housing and the issue is quite clear that in our Property Plan, Sir, we anticipate to sell over a 10-year period 60 units a year which is around 600 but over 200 have been approved by this Assembly now which has taken place. So we intend to sell-off stock of around 600 units over a 10-year period but it is intended that the Housing Department must, over the 10-year period, replace a lot of that with sheltered housing. It is anticipated that the Housing Department, through sales or otherwise, will purchase approximately 400 units for sheltered housing to place people in that have not got any Parish affiliation and what have you. But I have to say...

The Bailiff:

Thank you, Minister. You are time expired.

4.6 The Deputy of Grouville:

If a person is given a 5-year (j) category, given the Minister's previous answer to me, does this mean that they will be in effect deemed locally qualified on day one and be able to purchase a house on day one?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Anyone given a (j) contract can immediately purchase through share transfer a property for the duration of that contract. At the finish of the contract, whether 3 years or 5 years, that person has to remove themselves from that property and that property has to be sold back into the open market to a Jersey locally qualified person.

4.7 Deputy J.B. Fox:

The question was asked, which the Minister answered involving environmental improvements. Can I remind him that that should also include “youth facility and amenities” and especially those for teenagers so that the quality of life will be enhanced for all once the developments are built. Thank you.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The Deputy knows very well that I have worked fully with the Deputy in the past to have his experience in assisting us and I will say this to all Members. The Deputy will know with what you have seen at Le Coie over the last weekend or so, with Headway and other users, that I am very, very conscious of community issues. Having the ability to manage our stock in a better way with some sales and all that will give us a huge opportunity to hugely improve community facilities in all our estates.

4.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The very first question the Minister answered explained his idea of sheltered housing which I think is assisted living for the elderly. At a recent Parish Assembly, the Assistant Minister of Housing said that sheltered housing was needed for people who had 4 or 5 bedroom houses who wanted or needed to downsize to 2 bedroom bungalows. Is this in addition to the 400 or 500 assisted living or is this included? We really need this clarified. Thank you, Sir.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

It is in addition and we believe, Sir, through the information coming forward to us all the time either to Planning or to ourselves and certainly through Parish Deputies... I know Deputy Power had several people in St. Brelade of large family homes with large gardens who, through medical difficulties, would like to purchase a smaller property to release those family homes into the marketplace. This is what they are doing in places like Ireland and parts of the U.K. now; releasing family homes in the market. In addition.

4.9 Deputy A. Breckon:

I wonder if I could ask the Minister again in reference to sheltered housing if there are any joint policies with Health and Social Services and Social Security, for resources and servicing, for what could be sheltered housing projects.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

We work very closely with the Health and Social Services and, in fact, the officers in the Housing Department and the Health and Social Services are as one, in other words, and I would say they have got an excellent working relationship. In fact, we are being pushed at the moment by the health authorities and the Health and Social Services to really push for sheltered housing. It is in their mandate to keep people in their homes for a longer period of time so they can be cared for close to their children and otherwise and we are being very, very hard pressed by the Health Authority at the moment to press the Planning Minister to re-zone suitable land.

4.10 Senator L. Norman:

On the same subject, could the Minister tell us what are the criteria for people to get on to the sheltered housing waiting list and then to be allocated such a property?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I cannot answer for the Parishes. The Parishes have got their own criteria: certainly, Trinity, St. Ouen and other sheltered homes in the Parish of Grouville and I cannot answer for them. But the criteria would have to be the similar criteria with medical needs, age-related issues and financial needs and it would be for people over retirement and particularly for those with real medical problems.

4.11 Connétable G.W. Fisher of St. Lawrence:

With regard to St. Lawrence, the Minister knows that we are hopeful that we might be able to add 4 sheltered housing units in the fairly near future in St. Lawrence and we are currently in negotiations for a further 8. There is also the hope that the Goose Green Marsh development, which we will be talking about later in this session, will also deliver some sheltered housing units. I have no idea at the moment how many people with St. Lawrence connections need sheltered housing other than my own waiting list in St. Lawrence and I would be grateful if the Minister could tell me how many sheltered housing units he has on his list that are needed in St. Lawrence and if he cannot tell me now, could he give me that information, Sir? Thank you.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir, we cannot give you that information. It is all data protected, for a start. **[Laughter]** Sir we have got a waiting list of around 368 or 370. A waiting list waiting to be housed now and remember there has not been a sod of turf turned over. The 2002 Island Plan has not produced one sheltered home anywhere on the Island. That is how desperate we are but what the Connétables have got to realise, Sir, although we are going to be working with the Connétables, the Housing Department are housing people from all over the Island and all over the place and I would rather hope that the Connétables, when they have some vacancies, would work with us so we can try to allocate some of those homes to people that are real need - Jersey people. The Constables might not always have a full waiting list but we certainly can assist by placing people in those places who want to be perhaps close to their children or their families.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Could I just follow-up on that, Sir, very quickly?

The Bailiff:

Connétable, I am sorry.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

I am happy to give way, Sir.

The Bailiff:

Very well.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

It is simply this that we, as Connétables, have to justify an investment in sheltered housing with our parishioners and they have to agree to it and in order to do so, we have to make a case. At the moment, I have not got any statistics to put to my parishioners. Thank you, Sir.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir, but I have to also make the case that if the Connétables are going to be providing sheltered housing and, after 25 years, realise a huge capital asset to their Parish, I have got to also answer to the Treasury as to why I am sending letters of comfort to assist the Parishes. It is a joint initiative and I would rather hope that if there is any difficulty with any of the Connétables, I know for a fact - I am pretty certain, Sir - that we could fill all the units in St.

Lawrence with people with really close connections from St. Lawrence. I could give an assurance to the Connétable on that.

The Bailiff:

Thank you, Minister. Well, that concludes questions to Ministers without notice. There are no matters under “J”.

Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

I have the answer to the question asked by Deputy Le Hérisier regarding mobile phone use in the General Hospital which is that people can use mobile phones in the General Hospital except in areas where there are signs to the contrary.

The Bailiff:

Thank you, Assistant Minister.