

HOUSING COMMITTEE: VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE

**Lodged au Greffe on 12th October 1999
by Senator L. Norman**



STATES OF JERSEY

STATES GREFFE

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PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion -

that they have no confidence in the Housing Committee.

SENATOR L. NORMAN

NOTE: As required by Standing Order 18A, the reason is given below and the following States members signed the proposition -

Senator P.H. Horsfall
Senator C. Stein
Senator N.L. Querée
Senator F.H. Walker
Deputy T.J. Le Main of St. Helier
Deputy R.W. Blampied of St. Helier

The reason for moving this proposition is that the Housing Committee has shown itself to be incompetent and is failing to comply with the strategic policies of the States and its own strategic policies.

Report

On Tuesday, 5th October 1999 the Housing Committee published the "Housing Strategy Report 1999 - 2003" (P.148/99) in which the Committee reaffirms the policy of partnership with Housing Trusts on the basis of subsidised loan arrangements.

On Wednesday, 6th October 1999 the Jersey Homes Trust were informed that:

1. that the Trust will not be supported in developing any more housing;
2. that the Trust will be expected to finance completed developments on 25 year leases;
3. that the Trust should discontinue its negotiations with private developers;

and on Thursday, 7th October 1999 -

4. that the Trust's role in the Waterfront development has been terminated.

At the time of drafting this report the Chairman of Les Vaux Housing Trust has received no similar communication.

This is an extraordinary, unilateral *volte face* decision made with no consultation with the Trusts, but more significantly, without consultation with the three other States' Committees (Policy & Resources, Finance & Economics and Planning & Environment) who have been working in partnership with the Housing Committee to improve the social housing provision.

400 urgently needed social rental homes have been put at risk. Homes which have been the subject of considerable time, effort and money by States' Departments, Housing Trusts and developers. There is no doubt that many of these will be lost as a result of the actions of the Housing Committee - including those on the Waterfront. By denying that the social housing programme will be affected (see JEP, Saturday, 9th October 1999) the Committee has demonstrated that it has still failed to understand the implications of what it has done.

The Committee seem to think that Trusts will be able to borrow £millions to develop housing schemes on land they will never own on an asset which will reduce in value every year over the twenty five years as the lease expires. The suggestion is as unbelievable as it is ludicrous.

Currently some 422 local families are on the rental waiting list. The Housing Committee forecast this to increase to 821 by 2003. Through the actions of the Housing Committee, this is now likely to rise to an unprecedented number of 1,200 families in that timescale.

It is the Housing Committee's role to concentrate their efforts in supporting the most vulnerable in our society. Existing States' tenants and tenants of Housing Trusts no longer have, in the main, a housing problem. They have decent, affordable homes. First time buyers have assistance in other ways, for example, a subsidised loan.

It is those on the rental waiting list who will suffer as a result of the Housing Committee's unilateral action. Those who do not have a decent home, those who cannot aspire to own their own home. Those who, until recently had hope which has now been cruelly put in jeopardy.

Further this new policy is unable to be put into effect without significant additional financial and manpower resources - both of which require major changes in States' policies.

The Housing Committee's Strategy document (lodged "au Greffe" on 5th October 1999) includes many statements of support for the policy of partnership with Housing Associations and for the need to work co-operatively with other States' Committees:-

In her introduction the President states:-

"The joint meetings of the four Committees - Policy and Resources, Finance and Economics, Planning and Environment and Housing - have been a valuable step towards the greater co-operation that will be necessary if we are to meet the housing needs of our community."

"....the Committee will need to work with not only other Committees of the States but also with Housing Trusts....."

On page 9, the aim "TO ALSO ENABLE HOUSING FOR THOSE IN NEED TO BE PROVIDED THROUGH A RANGE OF FUNDING MECHANISMS, IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST COST EFFECTIVE USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS"

to be achieved by:-

Supporting Housing Trusts through appropriate subsidies to provide additional social rented housing”.

On page 30 at paragraph 2.4(ii) the Housing Committee sets out what now we must assume is the previous policy of the Committee. This section concludes -

“..the Committee believes that Trusts, operating under clearly defined regulations, offer the opportunity to provide the Island with affordable rental accommodation.....”

*“Housing Trusts have an important role to play which complements the Committee’s own activities **and the Committee will continue to foster this partnership.**” (My emphasis)*

I urge members to read carefully this paragraph of the Housing Committee’s report on pages 30 to 35. Any fears or misunderstandings about the role, regulation and powers of Trusts are adequately dealt with - *by the Housing Committee.*

The manner in which this policy has changed in only days is clearly a grave cause for concern. The Housing Committee is a member of the four Committee meetings and has had many opportunities to inform and discuss this radical change in policy. It has chosen not to do so.

The Committee has not even discussed this new policy with the very people with whom they claim to want to foster partnership, the Housing Trusts. In fact during their term of office they have failed to meet with members of the Housing Trusts despite requests from them.

The cavalier treatment of Trustees and developers who have spent much time and effort over several years while working towards delivery of hundreds of homes can only bring the States into disrepute and will ensure that the private sector will not wish to co-operate with the States on any housing projects in the future.

Up to this point the four Committees mentioned above had been fully committed to the Housing Forum which had sought to develop partnerships with the private sector. These meetings were about to deliver hundreds of new homes in the built-up area. It is very probable that the mistrust and loss of confidence in the Housing Committee will destroy the Housing Forum process and sites which were going to provide much needed homes will be developed for other purposes.

The decision not to include rental units on the Waterfront is extraordinary enough, but the manner of its announcement was unbelievable. This dramatic change of policy was casually announced in a letter to the Jersey Homes Trust without any consultation with anybody at all. Not WEB, not Finance and Economics, not Planning and Environment.

The effect of this decision alone is an even longer waiting list for rental accommodation.

This appears to be a Committee obsessed by its own political agenda, and it is the most vulnerable in our society who are going to have to pay the price.

It is an agenda that will not work and must be defeated before the implications of it become irreversible.

Fortunately, the situation can still be retrieved, but this can no longer be done by the present Housing Committee. Time is of the essence and the States must put the matter right with the minimum of delay. To wait until the appointment of new Committees on 14th December 1999 will be too late. Not to act promptly and decisively will see a major disruption of and shortfall in the States’ housing programme.