



Please reply to:

The Chairman
Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel
Scrutiny Office
States Greffe
Jersey
BY EMAIL

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Dear Connetable Jackson

Affordable Housing; Supply and Delivery – Scrutiny Review

Thank you for the opportunity of submitting the views of the Jersey Homes Trust.

The imminent publication of the Housing Minister's "Housing Action Plan" would seem to overlap with the very issues you are seeking to address in your Scrutiny Review. Presumably, now, your main impetus will be to consider and respond to the Action Plan.

I will therefore submit some views in this context, which I trust may be helpful. I would be most happy to engage further with your Panel, should you so wish.

The Action Plan will propose the establishment of arrangements for improved strategic collaboration between relevant Ministries. In over 25 years of involvement in social housing provision, I have seen such collaborations come and go. Of course, there should be collaboration, formal or informal. This is a small island. Working together to achieve common objectives should not be so difficult. Above all, the supply of sufficient affordable housing should always be a Governmental priority. We are in the current crisis because, for ten years or more, that has not been the case. In publishing an Action Plan it is to be hoped that the Housing Minister may be successful in pushing housing supply up the political agenda. That is, after all, his main role. The SHU (Strategic Housing Unit) has not acted successfully at the strategic level so far.

Regrettably, the Action Plan will fail to mention any role for the Housing Trusts. Their contribution to the supply of affordable housing in the past has not been insignificant. The Jersey Homes Trust has the track record, the experience, the ambition and the available finance to make a further useful contribution. The Trusts should not be viewed as competitors to Andium Homes, but as a good and healthy co-provider, offering choice and alternatives. They should be appreciated and supported. Whilst independent, they are Jersey institutions and part of the Island's heritage.

Government-owned sites suitable for housing development must be released to social housing providers. Clear guidance must be given to Property Services that their stewardship of all such sites implies a priority to achieve affordable housing provision before any secondary consideration of achieving sale proceeds. As matters stand, Property Services have no such clarity of purpose.

The target delivery before 2025 of 1,500 affordable homes is commendable. Andium Homes are to be congratulated on their present development projects. I am asked, is this objective sufficient? In short, it is not. Jersey has fewer dwellings per head of population than the UK, which has fewer dwellings per head of population than the EU. The UK has a housing crisis. Jersey has a worse housing crisis. Property prices here are now much higher even than in London, The statistics of housing need in Jersey continue to be drawn from the waiting lists of the Affordable Housing Gateway. This is a scandal. The criteria for acceptance on to the Gateway rental waiting lists are recognised as restrictive. For years I have campaigned for the criteria to be relaxed, always with the same response: we must wait until supply is improved to avoid disappointment to applicants. So, because the need is not recognised, the supply is never improved. In effect, demand has been adjusted to meet the supply, instead of the other way around. A decent affordable home is the right and a necessity of every family. Governments must intervene to ensure that this essential provision is achieved for those unable to afford a home. In Jersey, couples without children are not supported or even counted, regardless of their financial circumstances or ability to rent a home. For the purposes of housing need statistics and measures to meet demand, they do not exist.

The mechanisms by which Government can address the supply and affordability of homes are all well understood. Many of these will be described in the Minister's Action Plan. It just takes prioritising and money to effect change and solutions. The political will has not been in place for some years. A "population policy" has, instead, been a promised priority for 20 years. No such "policy" has ever been properly defined and any such objective has clearly failed. Even if, after Brexit, immigration controls may become feasible, there remains an acute shortage of housing for the present population. It is to be hoped that the structures proposed in the Action Plan by the Minister, largely in response to the recommendations of the Housing Policy Development Board, will be successful in revitalising the political environment. I wish him well in this.

Yours sincerely
The Jersey Homes Trust

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