

23.01.17

2 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Housing and Communities regarding building strong communities (OQ.1/2023):

Given that a flourishing “community” is part of the Common Strategic Policy, will the Minister provide his assessment of whether it is appropriate for Andium Homes to have a policy of encouraging some residents who have lived in “non-town” communities for a long time, and who are established there, to move from those areas into St. Helier when downsizing?”

Deputy D. Warr (The Minister for Housing and Communities):

Thank you for your question, Deputy. We did speak about this last night so there is obviously some development on this idea but here is my answer. All social housing tenants, not just those with Andium Homes who have applied to Gateway to downsize and have been accepted to do so, are required to actively express interest in suitable properties available regardless of location. Existing tenants have a greater degree of flexibility and choice than others on the waiting list as they are not re-banded to a lower priority band if they do not consider properties in all locations or accept reasonable offers made to them. It is everyone’s interest to help anyone looking to downsize.

4.2.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Minister for that and I also recognise that we did speak yesterday, and I appreciate his time because this is a complex issue. The Minister may be aware that there have been debates in this Assembly mostly focused on affordable housing for purchaser band 5 in Andium where, in particular, the Constables or other Parish representatives have spoken about the importance of people with links to particular communities remaining in those communities. It is the case whether people want to move from the private rental sector or from already who are in trust or other social housing within that because of the housing stock they are often compelled to move out of perhaps, shall we call them, semi-rural, semi-urban areas into the wider conurbation. In doing so we are uprooting people who might have lived in certain areas for years and decades. Does he acknowledge that that is an issue and that some more sophisticated formula might be needed to recognise priority to be given to those who want to live in an area rather than those who do not or are more flexible?

Deputy D. Warr:

You are absolutely right. Obviously one of the titles in my remit is housing and communities and keeping communities together is really important to me. I am conscious that the Gateway is first of all assessed on need as priority and the second issue is around time. Then there is this loosely, and as you say there is no legal requirement to adhere to this, is to keep people in their communities if possible. I think one of the points you made last night was around if there are 10 people looking for one property in their community how do you prioritise who is the most appropriate person to live there. It is an issue I will raise with Andium Homes and raise with the Gateway and see if there is another criteria that we can do. But I appreciate your point and it is a really valid one, thank you.

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

How long will a person be given to downsize and relocate and what factors will be taken into consideration?

Deputy D. Warr:

At the moment, as far as I understand it, you have a year to move if you are being asked to downsize in the rental sector. That is the current situation. Whether that is appropriate or not I do not know. It is something which I am open to review. As you have been aware, as of 1st January I already reviewed the criteria for the Gateway in terms of income levels so for me it is a very live issue at the moment. If there are issues around people being badly stressed about resizing, having to make big decisions within a year, and that is not an appropriate timescale, I am happy to review that.

4.2.3 Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I also asked what criteria will be taken into consideration as to whether that person will or will not be ... I do not want to use the word "forced", but encouraged to move?

Deputy D. Warr:

When you say forced/encouraged to move. I think what we have to recognise is we have to get the best use out of our housing stock. That may not sound a very humane way of doing things but, on the other hand, it is inappropriate for people who no longer require the level of accommodation, say a 3-bedroom home and who now only require maybe a one-bedroom home, to remain and effectively block that home from people who require that accommodation. It is a very contentious subject and we have to treat people like human beings, but it is appropriate that we proactively manage our housing stock to get the most efficient use out of it. I think I would be remiss if I did not do that.

4.2.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister have any concerns over the location of over-55 accommodation really in the centre of town by busy roads and with the sometimes associated issues that do come with living right in the middle of a busy town?

Deputy D. Warr:

I am not aware of these issues so if you can give me some examples that would be appreciated, thank you.

The Bailiff:

Can I just remind you, Minister, and indeed others, to talk through the Chair. "If the Deputy could give me further questions" that would be the appropriate way of dealing with that.

4.2.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Certainly as the District Deputies, we have dealt with some issues of exactly that kind and I will inform you.

The Bailiff:

Is this a question?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

So therefore, would the Minister encourage, as we did, the development of residents associations so that there is communication of those issues in a more formal way and they are nipped in the bud, if you like, before they grow?

Deputy D. Warr:

Thank you for your point there. Absolutely, I think it is the right thing to do.

The Bailiff:

“I thank the Deputy for his point.”

Deputy D. Warr:

I thank the Deputy for his point.

4.2.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

First of all, if I could thank the Minister for those answers. I did tell my constituent that I would raise her issue here. I know the Minister will not necessarily want to comment publicly on an individual case but I think it is important to tie this to a real person, and there are many like her.

[11:00]

So we have somebody who lives in social housing, she wants to downsize, she is in band 1 but she is under no compulsion to downsize. In doing so she is keeping a 2-bedroom unit, where she only wants a one-bedroom somewhere else in the Parish, from being refurbished potentially and also being occupied. That particular property does have issues that need attending to in terms of water ingress. Her mental health is suffering because she is under constant ... this has been a couple of years in the process. It seems to me that there should be a system whereby she can be rehoused in the community that she wants to be and free up that home for somebody else. I would just ask the Minister perhaps whether he would agree to accept other submissions from Members and to perhaps have a short sharp review from Members across the Assembly who might have knowledge about similar cases in their communities and about finding a better way forward in this area. Would he agree to that?

Deputy D. Warr:

Absolutely.