

2.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Housing regarding the assessment of demand for over-55s housing:

What methods, if any, are in place to assess accurately the demand for over-55s housing?

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

Members will know that the Housing Department keeps an accurate waiting list of those requiring such accommodation now and the Housing Needs Survey offers some robust statistical information about future need. However, we know that under existing arrangements those needing housing of any type can register with any number of providers such as the Housing Department, any of the trusts and a number of Parishes. It is not clear whether the same people are registered on more than one or all lists, therefore, it is difficult to quantify the overall long-term housing requirement of the population, not least our ageing population. It also creates a risk that individuals fall between 2 schools and their housing needs are not properly met because we do not know that they are in need. This is wholly unacceptable and it is something that I am trying to address through the setting up of a single means gateway to affordable housing which Members will recall was introduced as a concept in a debate on Jersey Homebuy. This concept would require anyone wishing to access any form of affordable housing to register and assess through the gateway where a master list would be maintained and provide accurate figures in respect of demand. This no doubt would be a recommendation of Professor Whitehead in her review of social housing.

2.2.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Given the enormous gaps that there appear to be matched by a considerable number of overlapping lists, would the Minister acknowledge that basically we have no real idea and he is just putting his finger in the wind?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, that is not correct. We have a very good idea and we are very well aware that we have a very, very strong - a robust - waiting list of over 300 at the moment where people are being assessed and in need. So we have a very good idea with all the information that has come to us of the ageing population accommodation needs.

2.2.2 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Again, I think the Minister for Housing is missing the point. He has stated there is a criteria for social rented housing and that criteria is on income which is quite low. So if the Housing Minister has over 300 people waiting for over-55s housing, why is he not talking individually or collectively to all the Constables who may have other people with a very good income, or large capital, there could be another 300 or 400 out there but they will not be on the Minister's list. They are not allowed to go on it because of his low criteria.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I have just answered the question that it is unsatisfactory at the moment; that there could be people on various lists, but we do meet with the Constables. Only last week my Assistant Minister and officers met with the Constables and we have a very good working relationship with the Constables and I am rather hopeful that once the recommendations of Professor Whitehead and the review of social housing comes to

this Assembly, then there will be a full discussion and the information will come forward through those discussions and you, Sir.

2.2.3 Deputy P.J. Rondel of St. John:

In my previous time in this House we were being told that we needed homes by the Minister, or at that time the President of Housing. I am appalled to hear that this research had not been done across the Island within all these different areas: the private, the Parishes and obviously his own sector. Would he please give us a guarantee that within the next 3 months he will bring a report to this House explaining that all this research has been done and give us the actual numbers of people who are on all these waiting lists?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The Deputy of St. John obviously does not listen to what is going on but **[Laughter]** how many times do I have to remind him that Professor Christine Whitehead is producing a full-scale investigation discussion document of the review of social housing? All the information that the Deputy would require will be included in that review for this Assembly to take part in. I am rather hoping that that review is in draft form now and within the next 7 or 8 weeks will be ready. The only reason why it has been delayed slightly again is because of the current economic climate and things have changed a little bit in various areas and we have had to take that into account.

2.2.4 The Deputy of St. John:

A supplementary. This report was promised in December, again in January, and we still are being told it will be another 7 or 8 weeks. Can he get his house in order and let us have this report by return, not in 7 or 8 weeks when we will have more questions to put to the Minister because he will have not done his work.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, I am not prepared to be bullied into that. **[Members: Oh!]** Quite honestly, I have just had to remind the Deputy that things have changed and there is now a severe financial - well, credit crunch, if you like - and ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Senator, you have made the point that you are not willing to bring it forward.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, I am not willing at the moment. It will come forward to ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can you keep the answers concise as appropriate?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

It will come to the Assembly when the time is right and it will be very soon.

The Deputy of St. John:

On a point of clarification, I am not a bully. If the bullying comes from anywhere it is from across the Chamber.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, it is inappropriate, I have to say, for Members to accuse each other of bullying. So, Minister, if you ...

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I quite happily withdraw that for the nice Deputy of St. John. [Laughter]

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Only to transfer it elsewhere. [Laughter]

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I would be very happy to do that as well. [Laughter]

2.2.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

My shoulders are broad; my skin is thick. In his meeting with the Constables, did he arrive at an agreement for shared criteria for the allocation of over-55s housing and did he discuss with the Constables the potential for overlap and solving any overlaps between their list and his list?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

There were discussions taking place on the last rezoning of land with the Constables and the possibility of allocations and lists. Yes, that was discussed with the Constables but I do not feel that we can move much further at the moment with the Constables, or anybody else, until this review comes forward where all of you - all Members - will have a full input in producing the policy that will make way for future needs of essential housing.

2.2.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, a supplementary. Specifically, did he and the Constables agree shared criteria for the allocation of housing and did he agree to cull the list to make sure - to ensure - that there was no overlap?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

We have not agreed anything finally. We are still in ongoing discussions.

2.2.7 Connétable K.P. Vibert of St. Ouen:

I will ask a question that I know the Senator does not know the answer to. Is the Senator aware that only yesterday the Comité des Connétables agreed on a proposed way forward to bringing all these lists together?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, I did not know [Laughter] and I welcome as normal the full input of the Connétables who are great allies of the housing needs. [Members: Oh!]

2.2.8 Connétable G.F. Butcher of St. John:

You are not getting attacked by St. John's totally. Recently the Minister pushed forward or encouraged fields to be rezoned for housing, one of which was in St. John. The rezoning went through last year in the middle of the year. I wonder if the Minister would know why the only spade that has been put in the ground there has been to put potatoes in this field.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am not sure, Constable, that we can say that arises out of the current questioning.

2.2.9 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier:

I was trying to progress the issue of Professor Whitehead's report and ask the Minister if it is going to go to consultation to the general public and if he could be a little bit more informative and elaborate on why this has been delayed due to cost reasons and the economic climate? I find that quite strange. If he could maybe indicate if it is going to consultation to the general public before it comes here and why has he given the reason for delay as a financial one?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

It will go out for consultation. It will go out as a Green Paper and I would expect and hope that everybody interested in this subject, including the public, would get involved in this consultation and bring forward ideas and views. I think the same point I made before with the Deputy of St. Helier is that there has been some radical issues on social housing and issues related to that over the financial difficulties in the marketplace at the moment, and we have had to make sure that we have all the boxes ticked so that all the questions can be answered.

2.2.10 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Will the Minister not admit that Professor Whitehead is bound to fail because he has just said he needs all the boxes ticked? The question is, do we know how many houses we need for the over-55s, and this review is on social housing? It will not give us a total answer. Will the Minister just admit that?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Absolutely wrong. We know very well that we, the Housing Department, through the information we have and the waiting lists and the needs and the redevelopments and everything else we are doing, are going to have to realign our stock. The Housing Department themselves will be requiring over the next 5 years something like 400 units of accommodation to meet the needs of elderly people who are seeking to be housed in proper accommodation that will suit their medical and physical needs and there will probably be more than that over a period of time as the ageing population becomes ... but it is getting a very serious problem at the moment, housing elderly people.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Then the Minister for Housing must support and call for over-55s housing. Thank you. [Laughter]

2.2.11 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister confirm that Professor Whitehead has in fact criticised the methods by which these numbers are counted and that she will be recommending that there be a single channel into over-55s housing overseen by the Housing Department?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I cannot tell you. I have not seen the draft document. I presume that the Deputy is quoting from having scrutinised Professor Whitehead and interviewed her. We have done many interviews with Professor Whitehead but certainly I am not aware of what the Deputy is saying.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Can the Minister confirm what he told her in those areas of policy?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I cannot remember. **[Laughter]**