

2025.01.21

Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity of the Minister for Housing regarding the veterans at Princess Elizabeth Court (OQ.13/2025):

Will the Minister advise whether the veterans who live at Princess Elizabeth Court, have returned home following the extensive damage caused by Storm Ciarán, and if not, will he clarify when they are likely to be able to do so?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South (The Minister for Housing):

My understanding is that all but one of the residents at Princess Elizabeth Court have been able to return home so far. We have asked Haig Housing for an update as to when the last can go back. I have not yet received that. I am hoping to hear back from them later today, and of course I am happy to share that information with the Deputy or any other interested Members when I receive it.

3.2.1 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

There are concerns regarding the quality of repairs and the habitability of the houses, even though the tenants were required to return.

[10:45]

Can the Minister outline what steps tenants could take if they are faced with this situation?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Indeed, this is something that we have been aware of for a while now, including going back to before Storm Ciarán. My team have been in constant communication with Haig Housing, and myself and the Minister for Home Affairs have met with the Chief Operating Officer of Haig Housing and, in fact, the residents as well. I understand that the Environmental Health Department are paying close attention to this and in contact with residents frequently. So, I would urge them to maintain that communication with them directly; with myself on top of that, if that is helpful, if they need quicker answers or responses from Environmental Health. That is of course all well and good but I would like to assure Members that in the long term, in ensuring that the support that is offered to these military veterans, let us not forget that they are people who we owe a special duty towards because of the Armed Forces Covenant, that we as a Government need to work with Haig Housing to find a better arrangement for them on-Island to better maintain their homes rather than, as has too often been the case in recent years, them forgetting about those homes because they are in Jersey and they are a U.K. (United Kingdom) charity rather than the Jersey-registered social housing provider.

3.2.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

Thank you to the Minister for his answer. The Minister mentioned that he was aware about problems at this home before the storm. I assume it is more than a year. Would the Minister advise to the Assembly what has been done in practical terms, what is different happened on the ground and what specific areas he is planning to address and when?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Just to reiterate the last point I made, just to remind Members that they are a U.K. charity; they are not a Jersey-registered social housing provider. In the last year, since the storm, the priority has been to work with them and do what we can to enable them to make the necessary repairs to those homes as quickly as possible so people can go back home, and many now are back home. But we have also been engaging in discussions with Haig Housing and Andium Homes about forming some kind of

partnership between them whereby Haig Housing can benefit from the expertise and the access to contractors that Andium has, so that they can respond much more quickly in future when there are problems with maintenance. Because one of the problems last time round is that they just were not familiar enough with the Island and the way we do things here and who is available to physically do works on properties. I hope that if we were able to sign off that kind of arrangement, which there is interest in, then hopefully that will improve things in the future as well.

3.2.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I got a bit concerned that, if I understood correct the Minister's answer, because it was a U.K. company the Minister has limited ability to influence and to make changes. Are there any other U.K. providers and if the Minister is planning to put something in place that the tenants from the U.K. providers will have the same support and assurance from the Government as the Island providers?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

They are not a U.K. company; they are a U.K. charity. It is important to make that distinction. I am not particularly aware of a large presence of U.K. companies running large housing estates in Jersey. I know that there will be smaller investors around about the place, but they would be covered by the private sector arrangements through the rental dwellings licensing scheme, through the Residential Tenancy Law. But I would encourage those, if there are others beyond Haig Housing that operate with a social ethos, as it is meant to be, that they have an open and willing partner in Andium Homes who are happy to partner up with them to help them manage their properties and provide much better on-Island services.

3.2.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Does the Minister believe that he has sufficient tools to ensure independent social housing providers deliver quality services if dialogue fails?

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

No, to be perfectly honest. But I reiterate, Haig Housing is not a Jersey-registered social housing provider so even if we had the framework of social housing regulation it still would not necessarily apply to them unless they went through the effort of registering as a social housing provider. In the absence of establishing a social housing regulator, which is something this Assembly has voted against previously, my team are working with the non-government-owned social housing providers to update our frameworks of working with them. In particular, there is one that we are hoping to have a new memorandum of understanding with soon and that would, in the absence of a full-blown regulator, provide better accountability for Government to make sure they are meeting their obligations.