

2020.02.04

15 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the reported lack of bedsits (or studio apartments) in Jersey: (OQ.41/2020)

Does the Minister share the assessment of recent reports that there is a lack of bedsits, or studio apartments, in Jersey and, if so, what is, in his opinion, the cause of the shortage and what is he doing to rectify the situation?

Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):

It is my assessment that there is an inadequate supply of all categories of housing, not just those referenced in the question. In terms of what would I attribute that shortage to specifically for these, I think that it is viewed that where lodging houses may have provided more of these sorts of homes previously, it is known that there are often some being converted into larger self-contained units. Presumably, that is because it is the people who own those properties view that as a way to make more out of the market there than providing bedsits. We have had the Objective Assessment of Housing Need report, which provides a helpful breakdown of what sort of homes we may need in the next 10 years and they have projected that based on several different migration scenarios. Our social housing providers are currently onsite this year to deliver 246 one-bedroom homes, which will help alleviate some of that demand. While the Housing Policy Development Board has not concluded its work at this stage, I think it is safe to say that it is likely to recommend a substantial increase in the States-led delivery of homes across different levels of need and that, of course, would enable the market to focus on areas that are not being delivered by the State as well.

4.15.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Does the Minister accept that bedsits and studio apartments fulfil a particular need, particularly when it comes to affordability for single people? Does he agree that there are issues with the planning law, which require units to be a minimum of 51 square metres, thereby making it impossible to build new bedsits in the current era?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

In terms of the practicalities around that, that would probably be a question better posed to the Minister for the Environment, who can give a more informed perspective on that to me. I would say that as well as issues of affordability, there is also the issue of quality of life and so I think that in providing, or trying to provide, as many more one-bedroom units as possible that do have a decent amount of living space, hopefully that can provide enough to meet demand, that those who will want to focus on bedsits will be able to have access to them, because there will not be as many people after them.

4.15.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The last time that the issue of bedsits came to my notice was something like 12 years ago, but then I was told that the then Housing Department was trying to move away from building any bedsits at the time and one-bed flats, with the associated well-being of those renters, was its priority. Can the Minister - I think you have just heard him say something like this - assure us that that remains his policy?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

It does, and I can confirm that social housing providers are currently onsite not delivering any new bedsits. They are focusing on one-bedroom properties.

4.15.3 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Has the Minister considered converting Cyril Le Marquand House into bedsits, to ease the shortage of such accommodation?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I hope my views on this is well-known, that I think the Cyril Le Marquand site ought to be earmarked for affordable homes of whatever tenure, or size, to be determined and I would not like to see that opportunity lost. Of course, there are other sites in the vicinity that I would have my eye on, such as Westaway Court, which, as we know, has not been utilised effectively in recent years.

4.15.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given that the Minister has just said it is a policy to not provide any more studio apartments in this way, while it was a homelessness charity which brought this issue to the attention of the Island, does the Minister accept that he may be creating problems of affordability in housing by sticking to his policy of not creating more studio apartment availability?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I think that is a very fair question. I said that it was not the policy of the States to deliver bedsits and so the bodies of the State, which we use to provide more homes, are not doing that, they are focusing on one-bedroom properties. I am told that it is the case that if you are eligible for support for a bedsit and there are not bedsits available, then income support can bump that up to a one-bedroom to make sure that you are more likely to find a roof above your head in that sense. It is the case that the work of the homelessness strategy review will be completed relatively soon. I think there is a draft report next week that is being reviewed and that may well indicate to us some measures that need to be undertaken to provide access to emergency accommodation. Often, that emergency accommodation may well not be a full one-bedroom property, but something smaller, because it is a stepping stone. When that is in our hands, we will be able to review what actions we need to do to make sure there is adequate support for people who find themselves in that situation.