



# Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny

## Panel

### Quarterly Public Hearing

## Witness: Minister for Housing and Communities

Wednesday, 12th July 2023

**Panel:**

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (Vice-Chair)

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

Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary

**Witnesses:**

Deputy D. Warr of St. Helier South, The Minister for Housing and Communities

Ms. N. Day, Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration

Mr. J. Norris, Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance

[11:02]

**Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (Vice-Chair):**

Good morning, Minister, and your team.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Jack Norris - I do not know if you know Jack - and Natasha Day.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I am Mike Jackson, vice-chair of the panel.

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

Deputy Mary Le Hegarat, District North, member of this panel.

**Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary:**

David Johnson, Constable of St. Mary on screen.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Thanks for coming to this quarterly public hearing of the Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel. Deputy Le Hegarat will kick off with the first question.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Minister, we are aware that there has been a formal consultation period as well as 3 events held at the Town Hall providing Islanders an opportunity to feed back on the proposed residential tenancy law proposals. Can you provide us with an overview of the main themes of concern identified among the feedback that you have received?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Sure. The good news is we have had engagement from, I think, 300 people who have responded. I say “people”; we have had 300 responses from all parts of the community. Obviously landlords have been very strong but we have managed to get access to a number of tenants and also multi-languages, from the Romanian community, the Portuguese community. I feel like we have really reached out very successfully on that front. In terms of what the main responses are, the leading one at the moment from the landlords’ point of view is the tenancy issue around ... sorry, I am trying to find the word. Open-ended tenancy, thank you. Open-ended tenancy is one of the issues and the other issue is around what we would call rent stabilisation but in some people’s language that is about fixing rents, rent control. Those are probably the 2 biggest subject matters that are of concern to people. From the tenants’ side of things it is about the condition of properties and the fear of expressing their concerns if the property is inadequate. We have had some very telling stories from Citizens Advice Bureau on that front. Citizens Advice Bureau, although they will not all be to do with conditions of accommodation, I think have received 2,000 queries in the last 12 months in connection with housing-related issues. There are clearly issues out there. As I say, we are uncovering an awful lot. What I would say about that is that it is going to take a little bit of time for us to triage our way through all of that and it may just delay our progress a little bit more because we want to obviously get this right, make sure we get the law right and adjust it accordingly.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Okay. The original consultation deadline was extended from 9th June 2023 until 23rd June 2023. Can you advise why the deadline was extended?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, we extended it because there seemed to be a delay in getting our communications out. It was not publicised as well. We had some criticism through social media that certain areas of people had not seen it, were not aware that it had started and so, as a result, out of respect to those people we extended the consultation period by a couple of weeks.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Can I just ask which methods of communication you are using, given that there is a change?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, absolutely. Well, the most effective one, funnily enough, for our immigrant community, put it that way, has been using cards, postcards, literally delivering them physically to Citizens Advice, to Caritas, to Salvation Army, and people filling in those cards. That has been a way of getting access into those areas. As you say, the issue always ... it seems everybody has got email or access to email and online and things like that. Yes, some do but there is an awful lot of people who do not and we have found that an effective way and also we have been putting posters up in these various outlets as well to say "please engage".

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Did you use commercial outlets where people tend to congregate, such as coffeeshops?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Coffeeshops, that is right. Do you know what, off the top of my head I would not be able to say if that was the case. I do believe we did. I need to know if Adita(?) did go into some of the coffeeshops. I know she did a lot of extensive walking around trying to make sure we had posters up in these various establishments. As I say, I would need to ask, go back to my team and say ... maybe Natasha can confirm.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

The town pop-up events were outside a coffeeshop and they were very busy and popular during lunchtime hours. We did 3 sessions over the course of a week. At that point it was mostly tenants that were engaging with our officers and filling out those postcards, so it was a more accessible way to engage with the main themes of the consultation.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Just to add, what we did was from a tenants' point of view we got some feedback that they felt a little threatened in the public areas, such as the parish hall. We had one situation whereby a tenant was sitting behind her landlord and felt that she could not make any comment. So I think these are the challenges we face.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Okay. When do you anticipate publishing the feedback gathered from the consultation?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

As soon as we have triaged our way through it all. The engagement level has been huge and the amount of ... I would like to say we need at least a couple of months. Natasha, I know, is going to look at me aghast and go: "How much officer time do you think we have got?" But certainly by the end of this year we will have ... we will have certainly published something. Whether we are able to bring something forward for further ... because obviously from that we are then going to inform rethinking our law and what we are putting forward and that will then go out to consultation again. So my timeline is for the end of December, is by the end of this year we will have got a significant way down that route.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Is this then going to have an effect on the timeline of delivery of the residential tenancy law reform proposal?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, good question and I think what we have to bear in mind is this is something which has been ongoing ... the law-drafting instructions, I was just reminded the other day, started in 2021, would you believe, so before my time. So it has been a running thing going all the way through. I would say my anticipation was first quarter next year to have something out there. That was my anticipation. Now, whether that will slip to the second quarter that remains to be seen, but that is the timeframe I am looking at.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Okay, moving on, there is obviously some matters that are being raised by the landlords but what about regarding the administrative burden that new reforms may impose?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. I think what you are referring to is not just us updating the residential tenancy law. It is also about my colleagues on the dwellings, bringing in a law which is a going to be debated in the States next week, and clearly there is also issues around the carbon neutral road map. So I do get the fact that there is a perception out there that there is an awful lot of red tape coming down the track in a very short period of time, so I think we need to maybe reflect upon that as the Government and see if we can push those timelines out so that it does not all feel like it is piling in in one go. Having said that, I think with the residential tenancy law it would be hugely unfair on particularly those people

who feel they want to go to a housing tribunal and want some recompense and things sorted out for us to say, well, we are going to push it down because landlords feel there is too much red tape. I think that would be very unfair on tenants and I would expect them to object to that strongly. So I think there is a balance to be had in all of this. I really appreciate that.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Okay. To what extent have concerns been raised that landlords may sell their properties if these proposals are adopted? If significant concerns have been raised, to what extent does that concern you?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, I mean, they are selling a property which is ... it depends. If they sell it to another landlord there is no impact on the tenancies at all. There obviously already is ... there will be a churn in the market as people decide to retire and come away. I am not sure I have seen an awful lot of evidence about that. However, I think it is important and I recognise that we do not impinge on landlords to such an extent that we feel like we have forced them out of the market. I think this is where this balance, this fine line we have to find, which is making sure we do not overburden landlords but at the same time give adequate protections to tenants. So it is a fine line to be done. I was actually quite surprised that even our White Paper had triggered some of that commentary, given that we were in a consultation period. I guess people like certainty. They want certainty and so those ... on that point.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I am not a landlord but in a situation that has been raised to me, if you happen to own an older property with perhaps a couple of flats in it which need constant work, there is a point at which, particularly with building costs these days, you are going to look at it and say: "Well, how much do I have to invest in this to make it work?" It has to stack up financially. What would your advice be to someone in that situation, not necessarily a big landlord? It might be somebody with one flat.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I get that, but the reality is we have to adequately house our population and if there is a sense that we tolerate substandard accommodation, I think that is a really bad message to go out into society. Now, if as you said, it is an old building and it needs a lot of work, then that individual must reflect upon that and go: "Well, maybe it is not a viable option for us to carry on doing these things."

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Do you anticipate properties going out of the rental market?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I would like to think the properties that might go out of the rental market might be the ones which are substandard and, without being funny, we do not want them in the market.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Good morning, Minister. You referred earlier to the open-ended proposal. How significant a problem do you consider that? I can see from my point of view that that is the almost crucial aspect of the whole thing, that landlords will not be able to rent if they do not have ultimate control over properties that may be nearby or whatever. How much of a problem is that from your position?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, obviously, there are people who do not quite understand what an open-ended tenancy means exactly but, as I say, we are very conscious in some ways it is about the language and how that is used. Absolutely there is no way that landlords lose control of their property with open-ended tenancies. That is just fiction. What I will do, Natasha, would you like to go into detail on open-ended tenancy a bit more and make some further comments about that?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, sure. I think the point to be clear on is that the proposals were not to take away somebody's ultimate right to their own property, and I think that was quite a wide misconception of the Minister's policy intent that we tried to clarify, particularly during the public sessions that were held at the Town Hall and that gave us the opportunity to better explain in a bit more detail. I think that is in part a symptom of providing what is quite a high level report, which will ultimately result in very detailed law-drafting instructions where all of the nuances about what an open-ended tenancy is and how that functions would be drawn out. We would explain that there are many reasons why an open-ended tenancy would end, like if the person wanted to sell their property or they have a family member that needs to move in. Ultimately there always must be the opportunity to have a significant notice period that will basically ensure that a tenant is not evicted without notice, which is a main concern at this moment in time. I think the general feedback has been quite strong about open-ended tenancies and that is not just from the landlords' side, it is on the tenants' side too. People like to have the certainty of a fixed term tenancy where they know at what point their tenancy will end. From the Minister's perspective, the point that needs to be considered is the role that open-ended tenancies play in rent stabilisation. Rent increases are typically made upon the refixing of a lease. Most standard leases have an R.P.I. (retail price index) restriction built in, which is part of the Island's existing rent controls from the 1946 law.

[11:15]

So the challenge for the Minister is to listen to the feedback about open-ended tenancies and the framing of that but still being able to address that challenge of the sudden rent increases that you get from somebody being able to refix a fixed-term tenancy basically.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Thank you.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Could you talk us through how you are ensuring a balanced proportion of views from both landlords and tenants are heard during the consultation process?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

As we said, that is the challenge. The Landlord Association is very vociferous and very strong and very strong-willed and I get that. They make up a significant proportion of rent dwellings in the private sector in the market, so it is their livelihoods at stake here. Having said that, we want also to hear from the tenants and that has been the biggest challenge: how do we get tenants feeding back into us? We have had this housing matters email address, which people have been able to respond to and tell us about but also people like Citizens Advice Bureau who collect data and intelligence on that front. As I already said, Caritas has been helpful in getting into the minority communities, as has Salvation Army. We are very much proactively collecting that data and information. What you have to bear in mind is people are very busy. They have got their day jobs and sometimes it is a reminder. We all are very aware of a consultation period going on. There are lots of people on this Island who have no idea that there is any type of consultation period going on and it really is the biggest challenge, I think, of this Government and the States in general to engage with the general public in a broader point.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Just to explore that, in terms of getting in touch from a tenants' point of view, a lot of people do not like to put their views down in writing but will probably make a phone call. Is there a phone line?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, the email they can do but the cards were anonymised and also if you filled in the form online it was also made the point to us that you did not have to complete your name in there as well, because that was an issue at the very beginning of the consultation period when it was recognised, exactly to your point, that some people just do not want to put their name down.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

What about a phone line?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do not believe we had a phone line, did we? I think we were emails, we had web address, we had cards.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

A free post address.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

A free post address, yes. I do not think we had a phone line, sorry.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

At our last quarterly hearing on 26th April you explained that you were meeting with social housing providers with the aim of producing a formal definition of social housing and social housing providers. Can you update us on this and when you anticipate publishing a new definition?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, again, I think this is all part of our consultation period, which is ongoing at the moment. So we will not publish that definition until we have gone through this consultation, we have triaged our way through all of that and then we will publish some ideas around that, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Minister, running parallel to your residential tenancy law reform proposals, on 5th June the Minister for the Environment launched his Public Health and Safety (Rented Dwellings) (Licensing) (Jersey) Regulations, which would propose a licensing scheme to regulate rented properties. Given the close relationship between these 2 pieces of work, can you detail what collaboration you have had, if any, between yourself and the Minister for the Environment?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

These kind of dovetail together. So, on the one hand from the Minister for the Environment's point of view ... what I think has been smart with this ... I know the States Assembly has voted this idea down on many occasions in the past and let us keep our fingers crossed we can get this one over the line this time. I think what has been smarter is making sure any charges that apply to this are minimised. I think we are looking at £30 over a 2-year period, something of that order, and I know that is £2.50 a month or whatever in terms of costs, so I think that is really good. But it dovetails in with my residential tenancy law, so if someone is living in substandard accommodation, first of all they did not have the power to go and check it out. Also then if my law then lines up with a housing tribunal, that enables tenants to have a way out, as it were. In other words, they do not feel so

fearful that they may get thrown out for making a complaint. The 2 laws in many ways, as I said, dovetail. They work together to give more strength to ensure that the quality of accommodation on this Island is fit for purpose. For me, it is a really good ... I do not want to use the word win-win but I do think those 2 laws working together give us a far stronger package in terms of protections for those landlords and tenants.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Going back, this panel, having looked at this on previous occasions, has come up with concerns, if you like. One of them I recall is the administration cost of the scheme. Where is the overlap there? Is there an overlap between your department and the Environment Department in terms of the condition of the properties?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

On regulation? Well, regulation sits with Environment, so that is his bag. I think one of the points he has made is they are going to grow their department's regulation team as a result of this law coming in, so in terms of government numbers of people going to be dealing with the issues. I think this is the point, and I think it is a really important point, is what is good about this is we get to know who the landlords are, where the properties are, in a very formalised way but I think there is this fear that suddenly Government is going to start appearing on ... knocking on everybody's door trying to find out where the bad landlords are and all the rest of it. I think it is going to be the other way round. If you did that, you would need a regulation team with I do not know how many people in it. It would be ridiculous. What it is, it is an attempt to be more reactive. We have a law which does stuff but we are reacting to people's complaints and concerns. We are not going in heavy-handed, heavy-mobbed, and it is also going to be a process of growing involvement.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

In terms of the reaction, are you saying that Environment will get all the feedback and deal with it?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Correct.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

In terms of your department, clearly you are dealing with housing needs. Will they not come back to the Housing Department or will you just bat them on to ...

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

The housing advice team and I in the regulation directorate serve both tenancy matters and public health and safety dwellings legislation, so it would be the same officers that would be looking at the

key issues. In terms of the overlaps between the legislation, there are some improvements that we are looking to make to the tenancy law that clarify really important property condition issues like who is responsible for a property when it becomes uninhabitable because of potentially an accident or because of the deteriorating condition of it. Also I think there is a lot of interest around the role of the housing tribunal that has broader powers that can consider both property condition issues as well as tenancy issues, one being about the fabric of the building and one being about the contract for the building. There is definitely some clear overlaps and between officers we remain in regular dialogue to see how we can bring greater synergies between the 2. One of the main benefits in the immediate term is simplifying the definitions between the 2 legislations, which at the moment can create some tension in how environmental health are able to take action in relation to property because what may be defined under one piece of legislation is different to how it is defined in another. So we are looking to improve that across the board.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

That is good because I think that has been an issue the panel has picked up in the past. Moving on, Minister, to what extent do you consider that tenants being able to anonymously report their landlords for poor housing conditions, which may lead to a round of inspection of the property under the licensing, will not lead to the inevitable suspicion from the landlord that the tenant has reported them and consequently still may have tenants reluctant to report them for any consequential revenge eviction?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, the famous revenge eviction. I think this is where the point of the housing tribunal is so important that we have because at this moment in time a tenant has nowhere to go and that is why lots of them shut up and put up with substandard accommodation because maybe the rent is cheap, they are prepared to put up with that broken window, all of those kind of things. I think what we have to recognise now is we are trying to introduce a step which is not going to cost them any money. The housing tribunal is a bit like an employment tribunal. As an employee, if you are appalled at what your employer is doing, you have a space where you can go to get someone to represent you and comply with the law. So I think tenants ... and I still appreciate that psychologically that is a challenge because obviously it is one thing to say it, it is another thing to do it, but the whole point of the housing tribunal is to give that neutral space, which is given enough power ... and this is going to be key in our legislation is making sure that the housing tribunal has sufficient power, legal power, to be able to maybe do some small fines, but for sure really pull up, whether it be a tenant or a landlord. We are focusing on tenants in this particular instance but clearly landlords will have issues with dodgy tenants as well.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

So in terms of the legal mechanisms, do you anticipate the tribunal will ... they will not be able to charge so how do you envisage the process working? Will they be passing it over to Law Officers to deal with, will it go to the magistrates' court?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We have not gone that far down the track yet but I would suggest that that kind of level of engagement would be as you have described, yes, for sure.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

In terms of the structure of the tribunal, have you got any further with that?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Again, this is another one where we are policy in development, to use that word, but I think what has been very apparent is the mix on the tribunal will be really important to get right. We have been talking about ... this is one of the failings of the rent control tribunal I tried to bring through the Assembly last time and failed to and it seemed as though no matter how we tried to finesse that, there were certain individuals who had been appointed which was unacceptable to certain Members of the Assembly. I think it is really important to learn from that and that when we come to appointing people on the panel they have a good mix. People are saying about a tenant, a landlord, somebody in social housing provision, et cetera. That is all well and good but they must also have expertise in housing. It is really important to have that fundamental understanding because you can be a tenant but if you have no clue of anything of how the law works and operates, your ability to make any sensible commentary is impaired. So that make-up is really important but, of course, obviously I do not appoint people to the panel. We have an appointments commission who do that. I do not think I can have any political influence on that at all.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

If I could clarify, the appointments commission may be involved with the appointment process but, as with the current legislation, it is ultimately the States Assembly that would approve the composition of a tribunal, because that is how the existing law works.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Have you started work on that yet?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Not yet, no. That is still a little ... that is still on the railway track, that one.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Giving you a rest from ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is fine. No, that is okay. It has been quite intense. It has been very, very good actually. It has been good. It has been good.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Going more underground in terms of the bridging liquid waste strategy ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

More underground right.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

... allied to the building plans, can you provide details as to any involvement you have had in the preparation of the bridging liquid waste strategy?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

If I am honest with you, I have not had much involvement. All that I would say is that there is a big recognition that without proper drainage some of the greenfield sites that we want to bring forward for building will not take place. Now, what I would say in defence of the Minister for Infrastructure and those involved in that is that they are trying to make sure that they target any infrastructure that they need to build on the most critical sites. Places like St. Peter where there is envisaged to be significant amount of building works, I think you would expect to see major investment in the drainage system in that area in particular. It is not going to suddenly appear out at St. Catherine's where only 2 homes need to be brought together. It has to be very targeted, but for sure what is really good is the funding is now there. Do not forget this has been a problem, not of this Government's making, of decades of underfunding in this area, so we have started to turn the corner on that front.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Can I just challenge that? What funding are you talking about?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

In the Government Plan, there are going to be significant amounts of money.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Just to clarify as part of the Government Plan process that Ministers are undertaking, they recognise the need to prioritise the liquid waste investment, but of course that will need to come back to the States Assembly later this year.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am sure all sensible States Members will see the importance.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

In terms of that investment, of course, it can be by Government or by the developer. How do you see that working?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

There are lots of arguments in there, are there not? If it falls on the developer, that means the cost of building those units becomes higher and that means we are into affordability issues. Clearly these sites are destined for first-time buyers and one of our objectives, our policy objectives, here is to try and depress some of those land values to make sure that those homes become properly affordable. That is where, dare I say it, you have not got to it yet but the £10 million ring-fenced is there in that, what assistance can we do in that area.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I was going to come to that. I just wondered how you envisaged I suppose injecting is the word that into the marketplace. Will there be some sort of gateway, do you think?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Through which people can apply? It is quite interesting, looking back and Jack reminded me earlier that in 2013 apparently we brought forward a loan deposit scheme, which Scrutiny apparently tore apart because they said it was not comprehensively researched and done. So we at this moment in time are trying not to make the same mistake twice, as it were, a decade later. As I say, there are different areas. I think one of the areas that could be interesting - and just a little slip this one out here - is around Government becoming I would say the equivalent of the bank of mum and dad.

[11:30]

That is the guarantor to give banks succour that they will get their money back. I think that may be a good use of that £10 million in some way, shape or form if we can get that through, but at the moment I think the team came up with 19 different options around this. We are triaging them out into red, orange and green at the moment and we are slowly getting our way through all of that. As highlighted in 2013, this is not an easy deal to make. It means Treasury has to work, the banks

have to be in agreement because otherwise if the banks will not back it, we are not going to get anywhere, and we have already. I think 2 days ago you met with the banks?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, we are in the process of meeting the banks at the moment on the preferred options.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I cannot remember the terminology but are you looking at the possibility of people only owning a percentage of the property?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, we already obviously have that scheme with shared equity under the Andium home-buy scheme, which is like 25 per cent . I know there are discussions about could we up that by another say 10 per cent, make it 35 per cent, which is in neutral territory, but we have to be very careful about whether that is supporting house prices or not. Again, these are the kind of nuances and details we have to be really careful on but they are all in the mix. I am very keen - I cannot stress - to get this out of the door as soon as possible because I think we are looking to get this out of the door by September. That would be my deadline date for that. Watch this space. One thing we have done just to assist in this area is, with Andium Homes ... I do not know if you saw an announcement we made about home buy, was making home buy more accessible to people with slightly higher incomes to recognise that because homes are so expensive in Jersey you have to have a certain level of income to even be able to afford something that is a shared equity scheme.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Picking up on that, you manage the gateway, I take it.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Would it not be better if Andium managed it?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, there are 2 types of gateway. So you have a gateway which is on a home-buy scheme and that is not really a gateway, it is a list of people on that side. The gateway is actually not managed by me, is it, it is managed by Social Security, is that right, or C.L.S. (Customer and Local Services)?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

There are 2 different types. The purchase gateway or the purchase pathway, as it is called, is currently managed by Andium Homes on behalf of the Minister. The social rented gateway is managed by Customer and Local Services. As part of the announcement to widen the current eligibility criteria for the assisted purchase scheme, we did highlight in that policy document that there is a need to consider bringing the purchase pathway back into the direct management of government, particularly to support the allocation of the rezoned housing sites, which, of course, may or may not be brought forward by Andium Homes. So there is a further action there to bring that administration into the Housing Advice Service.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

So, going down the housing development sites, are you aware of any that are currently paused until funding to deliver the bridging liquid waste strategy is in place? If there is none currently, do you know of any that need to be paused?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

There answer is no, I do not, I am not aware of that. I am aware of one development, I think it is in St. John, where we have been approached by a developer who has been very happy that we have upped these income levels for first-time buyers and getting that through and they will find there will be more demand for the homes that they are currently building. But in terms of delaying construction, is that more related to the Planning Department having to issue ...

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I think the question might be relating to the bridging liquid waste strategy.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay, sorry.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

As obviously I am sure you will be aware because you have been undertaking your own review into the bridging liquid waste strategy, it is not a straightforward answer for each of the sites. They have their own capacity challenges and their own possible solutions. For example, there are some sites where there are capacity issues. They are 2 sites side by side but it becomes an issue which site may be able to come forward and take the capacity first, which obviously is a challenge for those 2 sites which may drive which site comes forward. Other areas where it needs more significant public investment in order to allow them to be connected to the public foul sewer, that is the areas that the Minister for Infrastructure is seeking to prioritise through the bridging liquid waste strategy. So, like I said, it is not a straightforward answer. It depends on the sites and their conditions and what may be done through developer contributions or requires wider public investment.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

There will be some sites that the Government can seek to take for houses but cannot because they cannot advance the connection or activate it. Is that a concern?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes. The St. Peter area is an area that is being spoken about a lot. That is the part of the Island that has the greatest number of homes allocated in the Bridging Island Plan but it also has perhaps one of the greatest engineering feats required in order to accommodate the foul drainage that is required.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I suppose I am thinking of the smaller scale St. Peter proposals where you might have some homes that are unable to connect on to the network due to lack of existing capacity. There are planning applications for some properties where you might want to put half a dozen houses on the site of one but they cannot because of the restricted capacity. Do you see these solutions having to be provided by the developer of the sites to provide the number of houses that you need?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That you need, yes. That is a really good question. I personally would like to see that as part of the infrastructure deal for the very reasons that my concern is that if we keep burdening developers with more and more cost all we are doing is increasing the cost of housing and the cost of building and the affordability issue is there. I am going to try and be very careful here. That would be my take on it. I am not sure if the Minister for Infrastructure has exactly the same view or opinion on that but, as I say, I think it would make more sense that if we have funding, which has yet to be approved by the States Assembly, for doing this, I think we need to get on ... I think the Infrastructure Department needs to get on and do these things.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

It is back to me. It was announced the Jersey Development Company's scheme for the waterfront had suffered a major setback. The Planning Department said it could not support the application and there was nowhere to put the however many metres or whatever it is of contaminated waste that would be dug out of the area to create underground parking and service space. Can you further advise on any update for the construction of the 984 flats that are planned to built at the waterfront?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I cannot, but Natasha spoke at that particular meeting, so would you like to make a comment on that?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

In terms of the position, of course we wait to find out the inspector's recommendation and the Minister's final decision in relation to the planning application. Of course the need to secure a long-term pipeline of housing supply is really important and the regeneration of the waterfront area is vital not only to provide housing, good quality housing in St. Helier but also to improve placemaking access to open space and the community facilities that are due to be delivered as part of the waterfront redevelopment. As the Minister highlighted, officers spoke positively about the need to agree a framework to enable that to come forward. Ultimately the planning application that has been submitted for the waterfront is only an outline application with all matters reserved, so in any event subsequent planning applications have to come forward anyway for each individual block. I think if there is a situation that the planning application was ultimately refused, then the States of Jersey Development Company will have to reconsider their approach to bringing forward the individual sites within the wider south-west St. Helier planning framework.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

There have been discussions about the nature of the apartments being built there and clearly there is a juxtaposition between your needs as the Minister for Housing and planning requirements. The Horizon development has several storeys of apartments, some of which are really cheek by jowl certainly with the properties on the other side of the access roads. Do you feel that there is social implications by making developments too dense and ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Now you are getting into special planning guidance and obviously there are reports about ...

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I am, but I just wondered what your view is.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

My take on it is I think what we have to recognise it is really important that we get the infrastructure around that correct and much better in terms of what does the outside space look like and how does that interact with the buildings there. We have a requirement within town in general to densify town but it does come correctly ... the danger is are you going to cause social issues because you have over-densified, but I think this is where public realm and the investment in public realm is really important. It is interesting, I had a conversation with a couple of people who have recently moved into the Horizon developments and are very excited about them and I do wonder ... one of the things I thought you might bring up is about the space of some of them being below current minimum States standards. These individuals had no issues with that at all. They rather liked the idea of living in an

urban environment, a well-designed site which gave them access to town and all the facilities around town. Again, it is quite interesting. I always sense that there seems to be more criticism from those people who are not involved in these buildings compared to the people who actually own it and live in those spaces, but I do recognise it is really important that we get our public infrastructure correct, things like active travel and all of those areas. It is part and parcel of the whole package.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I think my observation that the risk of the other flats on the other side of the road are just over there and you get amplified music turned up, that can cause great upsets.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, I get that. I guess you can always go to Environment Health and make a complaint. That is the way to stop it.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

If these flats cannot be built there, can you advise the impact that that would have on Jersey's supply of much needed housing?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Basically it is 1,000 fewer homes, is it not? We have got a destination of ... Andium are trying to build 3,000. We have technically I think it is 5,000 altogether, is that right, as the number? But what I would just say to you very, very quickly, just to qualify some of that, we have seen recently in the population statistics that have come out, which have said that the population is not growing in the way it was a decade ago. We have seen a flatlining, if anything. We are seeing a slight decline. The question is the assumptions around the assessment of housing need, which was the report on which a lot of this was built out on, was built out on certain levels of immigration, et cetera. What I would say is, I do not know, it is going to be very interesting. I think we really need to get an update on that as to whether the number of homes we perceived we needed to build against what we are going to actually need going forward, given the changing circumstances, whether they still marry up or not. I think there is a significant piece of work that needs to be done in that area.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

How long does it take to develop that, revise how many we need, do you think?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Over the summer we are going to be reflecting on the pace of housing delivery and also the updated population figures that we received from Statistics Jersey just recently in their updated census report, so we can reflect on the starting position of the Bridging Island Plan that was established in

2021 when the housing assumptions were developed that said there would be need for 4,000 homes over the 5-year period. We can update that now we have a more rich dataset in terms of what housing we actually need relative to our demographic and how much we are delivering and, therefore, how far into that supply period we are in real terms in delivery. Just to clarify in terms of the waterfront development, that was outside of the Bridging Island Plan supply period because that is in the longer term Horizon because it will take until the late 2020s before those homes are delivered. I think the Minister quite rightly highlights that our population is doing things that it has not done for a considerable period of time and in the wider sphere things are rather uncertain, but I go back to the report that was published by the Minister for Economic Development that said in terms of Jersey's economy there is a dependency, a long-term dependency on migration that attaches to the Island's economic wellbeing. So it is almost inevitable that there will be population growth again in Jersey but we do not want to see that anywhere near the levels that had been suggested in that report, we need to improve our productivity, but I think in the long term more housing will be required. It is the pace at which that housing needs to be delivered that is the key question.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Just picking up on the nature of the housing, would it be one-bedroom, 2-bedroom, 3-bedroom flats?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

The weighting remains to be focused on one and 2-bedroom homes, so we have shrinking household unit sizes, which was demonstrated through the census, and also the updated housing needs survey report that was published just a couple of months ago by Statistics Jersey, which is about householders' intentions, that again shows a very heavy weighting towards one-bed and 2-bed homes.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Going back to the reassessment of housing needs, is it not the case that the ageing population will have a material effect? I am thinking here that a large number of properties are owned by people who are coming up to retirement age or are already at retirement age and we know that the number of working population is reducing. Now, I do not think those ... or I suggest that the number of properties owned by the elderly are not going to be ... may not find their way to the open market in the sense that people live a longer time, their next generation may well inherit them and that next generation will already be of retirement age when they do so.

[11:45]

I am concerned that a certain element of the housing stock at the moment will effectively be blocked from the younger ones for that reason. Is that something in your sights, as it were?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes. I think we are getting into a concept called right sizing territory when they talk about people who want to downsize out of larger homes. I think it is another area that is under consideration. Again, we talk about the £10 million. Can we get better use out of those homes? One policy idea is around if you have got a 4-bedroom house and there is 2 of you rattling around in it but you have your kids and they are struggling to find a home, can we help you invest in your home maybe that you could split your home out into 2 homes, as it were? Can we help in those kind of areas? You are absolutely right, there are lots of issues around there with this changing demographic but my take on it is I would like to see more can we get people into the right use of their properties more effectively. I think I would like to see more work done in that area so that we free up maybe some larger homes for families, for young families down the track, but I am conscious that quite a lot of people are what we call asset-rich, cash-poor, and that is a big challenge in its own right. I do not know, Natasha, if you are suggesting you might add something to that.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I will probably just pick up on a question that I perhaps did not even fully answer about when are we going to assess our long-term housing needs again. The objective assessment of housing need is a housing needs model based on the Island's demographic patterns. So when the population projections are announced by Statistics Jersey, which we hope to be the end of next year, we will rerun the objective assessment of housing need which will look at Jersey's demographic structure and basically model that into the future, which can take all of these things into consideration to make assumptions of the impact of the ageing population and what that means for access to housing and the type of housing that we need into the long term.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

May I ask a supplementary? Some years ago, about 4 years or so ago, there was a proposal to introduce measures that would prevent people not qualified in their right from inheriting a property from senior family members and that was eventually withdrawn. Do I take it that there is no such suggestion doing the rounds at the moment?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, I have not got that on my radar at the moment, I have to be honest with you. No.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Thank you.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

In light of the interest rates rising to the highest interest rate in almost 15 years, what actions, if any, will you be taking to assist home owners and first-home buyers looking to purchase properties? I think we have probably already discussed that. What consideration, if any, is being given to reducing stamp duty?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

When you talk about stamp duty, are you referring to the idea of first-home buyer, the levels at which stamp duty is applied on first-time buyer homes? At the moment it is £500,000 and what we are going to be bringing forward to the Assembly - you may be very conscious of this - in the Government Plan is to increase the level at which ... because that has not been changed. That level has not been changed in many, many years and I believe we are looking at a figure of £700,000 coming forward whereby there will not be stamp duty applied and I think that will be a welcome boost to a lot of first-home buyers, that is for sure.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

If you were considering the conversation that we have just had about downsizing, would you consider maybe the stamp duty elements in relation to those that would look to downsize?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am in the housing sphere. That is pre-empting the Treasury. I am not sure that Deputy Gorst would be enthusiastic to see the removal of stamp duty but why not, it is something ...

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

It is not the removal but what I am saying is that we are ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Alleviate.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

... considering stamp duty for first-time buyers but what I am saying is that ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

If you want to downsize can you ... and I get that. It is an absolutely reasonable question and I think it may well form part of our policy in terms of what we call right sizing and downsizing. As I say, at this moment in time that again is something that we are working our way through. It is probably something we should be thinking about.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

It could be considered as an incentive.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Exactly right.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

You have already mentioned about speaking to mortgage providers. Have you had any consultation or anything in relation to those struggling to make the monthly repayments?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

As far as we are aware, the banks that we have spoken to, because of their flexing of someone's ability to afford higher mortgage repayment levels, we have not heard very many adverse situations at this moment in time. Now, clearly, the longer this goes on ... and that is because people have fixed term mortgages, so when they first signed up ... there has not been ... not too many people are going into these variable rate mortgages, which was a case in point a few years ago. A number of people are fixed rate and that could be a fixed rate over 5 years. The impact of the latest changes may well not impact for a few years to come. Who knows what will happen by the end of 2024, where interest rates will be by then. At this moment in time, though, I do believe it is only impacting on a very small number of individuals. The reports back from the banks is they have not had any issues to date.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

What other options, if any, are being explored to provide mortgage interest relief for home owners in the current climate?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, I notice that Deputy Southern has put a proposition into the Assembly. At this moment in time I think it is very difficult to know where to go with that one because I think in the past we have had interest rate relief, tax relief on mortgages and things like that. I think the problem has been that people have seen it as only people who have mortgages who benefit from this and it is not fair across those people who do not have a mortgage, people who are renting and all of those kind of things. So I think there is a real sense that if you do some policy work in this area it has to be across the piece and it cannot just be directed at people who have mortgages. So at this moment in time I think that is the sense that prevails. Clearly what we have done is we have written to the banks and asked them to consider what they can do to ensure they do not push people out of their homes who cannot afford their mortgage at this moment in time, so maybe only pay interest, maybe extend the

repayment period, those kind of areas, but clearly we can only suggest that. It is not something that we can dictate but I have to say I think banks on the whole, people have to recognise, the last step is to repossess homes and we have seen even through COVID if you look in the U.K. (United Kingdom) very few homes were repossessed. I think there is a lot more consideration given these days in that area.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Within your department, do you provide any advice to individuals who may have concerns who sometimes are reluctant to talk to the banks?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Well, it is funny, I did have an email from an individual and all we could do was just say: "Go and talk to your bank" or your mortgage provider, I should say. It may not necessarily be a bank but: "Go back to talk to your mortgage provider because they are the people who can unlock that problem for you." People should not be fearful, to be honest with you, because it is not in the interests of the mortgage provider for you not to be able to pay for your accommodation. It is a 2-way street.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Unless they were selling it very cheap, they would not be able to sell it if they did repossess it. We have talked about the £10 million investment proposition. Is there anything that we have not already talked about that you would like to mention in relation to that, any new schemes that you might be considering?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I think in general I think most of the schemes we have talked about already are there. I am sure, given we had 19 to start with, there are a few out there that are on the radar but I think it would be unfair just to pick a couple out and say ... I think the main ones are the ones we have already discussed.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

We have already talked about some of your delivery plans and new schemes in relation to tenants being able to buy homes and Andium Homes. Is there anything else that you would like to provide us information-wise in relation to your links with Andium Homes, something that we may not have already been updated on at all?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Natasha, can you tell me if there is something new? I think at the moment, as far as I am concerned, Andium are doing a fantastic job in terms of delivery. It is quite interesting that they are delivering

so well that we may need to tweak some of our areas about gateway access to accommodate ... to line up demand with the supply of housing and the timing of those issues, so we are currently having a look at that.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

It goes back to the housing needs issue, does it not?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, it does but it is also one ... it is a bigger problem. It is not a problem, it is an opportunity really. It is one of we are building homes over a timeline that is different to how demand goes. When we set off on this big train, demand was perceived to be this much. Now, as delivery comes through, so demand has changed. You are right about the population issue but there are also issues around is the gateway broad enough, are we giving people enough access to these homes. I think that commentary has in the past been a criticism. In fact, I think it was in 2016. Jack, you will tell me, a 2016 Scrutiny hearing whereby they queried dropping the age, was it an appropriate size?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Planning Performance:**

There is always this line of whether you up the gateway to get a comprehensive picture of need or whether you ration the accommodation because you have not got the supply. I think the Minister is now in a position where the supply 10 years on from Andium being created you are getting that supply coming through, which gives you the opportunity to think more flexibly and more sort of innocently about how you can meet housing needs and where you can meet housing needs and where you can focus your efforts. I think that is the start of a new phase.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Going back to the housing needs survey linked to this, would that project ahead as far as one could possibly look into the crystal ball? It seems to me that if one broadened the offering you could live to regret it. I think that would be my concern.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Are you suggesting that social housing dominates and we just focus everything on social housing? Is that what you are implying?

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Well, no, broadness in terms of income levels, age criteria. Would we live to regret any broadening of the offering?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

At this moment in time, as Jack has explained, we have a real opportunity before us to enable more people to access social housing as Andium keeps continuing to successfully deliver their homes. In the longer term there is a more fundamental question about the shape of Jersey's housing market, which the Minister has made a commitment to develop a long-term housing strategy, which is the right place to consider that longer-term outlook and shape of where people live in Jersey and what that means in terms of is it a subsidy for housing or is it a journey into home ownership which then protects you from housing costs in older age, for example. These are really important questions but at this particular moment in time there is an opportunity to enable more people who are facing high housing costs to access social housing when the supply is available.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Would you envisage that shall we say for a younger person to be able to get on to the gateway as their career develops and their income increases that they would move out of social provision?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

On that front, obviously at this moment in time the policy is that they get checked on the way but ongoing they are not checked out. I think that is a really valid question and it is a question which was raised to me. I am not so sure about moving people out. I think that sounds like you are evicting people because they are earning too much money. I think maybe rather than giving them discounted housing, they would then ... maybe one idea would be to move them up to 100 per cent rental. In other words, their social housing provision is costing them exactly the same amount as ... but I would like to think that we talk about transitioning people into home ownership. That is my journey and for me the beginning of the journey is stability and that is what social housing can provide. I think then after that I would expect ... I would like to think that we get people into home-buy schemes. We can move them up on that so they have more skin in the game in Jersey. That would be certainly my long-term vision of how that would work out.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Home ownership is a very British thing. If you look at the continent it is not nearly as ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I know. I get that.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I wonder if we are barking up the wrong tree.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

We could be but I think the point that Natasha made earlier is that people with the lowest housing costs at this moment in time are people who own their own homes. In old age when maybe your income and your ability to generate income is diminished, you are reliant on a pension, the fact that your housing cost is greatly reduced gives you a better lifestyle. I think that is really worth thinking about.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

On the back of all of that, would there be any consideration for people being able to buy the Andium Homes house that they live in, so effectively I get a house through social housing but then decide I particularly like living in a particular area or whatever? Is that a consideration?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It is. When you say, is it a consideration, something like the Ann Street Brewery site for instance, which is going to be coming onstream, is half and half. It is half social housing and half to buy. There is that recognition. I think where we have to be careful from Andium's point of view is what we call pepper-potting. That is we have one home owned here in the middle of a lot of social rented, so we just have to be careful. That has to be managed quite carefully, but I think in general you think now Andium Homes currently sell to the order of 60 homes a year into the market, as they renew stock.

[12:00]

It is not just old stock. It is new build stock as well. There are opportunities to move people from social housing who can then think: "Hang on, I could get on to a home-buy scheme and buy another Andium home or buy my way into Andium."

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I think it was Grasset Park, was it not? Some were sold at Grasset Park; am I right?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, under the Andium home-buy scheme if a sitting tenant is in a position to purchase the home and it is part of their programme of sales, then the sitting tenant would naturally be given the opportunity to purchase.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Yes, that was the idea that I was thinking about.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Given the current cost of living crisis, has this led in any way to an increase in the number of people accessing the advice service that you provide? What are the main queries coming through at the moment?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is a housing advice question. I would have to ask them what the main queries are. I do know they are very busy and I do know that I get asked an awful lot about exceptions, dare I say it, trying to make ministerial decisions in those areas, which then makes me challenge is the balance of what we offer as a Government right but is there ... the Housing Advice Service is currently on the verge of increasing its capacity to accommodate that because I think it has been identified as a really important information centre for people who, as you say, may be struggling in the private sector and maybe should be looking at having social provision. Do you want to add any more data? I do not exactly have data on it as such, personally.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I would probably highlight the Citizens Advice as a service to Islanders. That is a good place for them to go where they are facing specific challenges with their housing. The Housing Advice Service can only provide limited information because obviously as the Government we cannot provide individuals with financial advice but there are other organisations out there who provide a great service to Islanders. In terms of how much their services are being accessed, we have heard from those service providers that demand on their services is increasing, which obviously is a concern but we continue to be extremely grateful that those services do exist to support Islanders as times get hard.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Just to clarify in my mind, we have got the C.A.B. (Citizens Advice Bureau), we have got the Housing Advice Service and we have got Andium. Are those agencies doing the same things or not?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, it is slightly different. Citizens Advice Bureau is a broad brush of issues. Housing Advice Service is specifically targeted at someone who has maybe been made homeless, how can we resolve that issue, or people who need support. They work with other agencies for wraparound services and provision in that area. It is very housing-led obviously, that area. Citizens Advice, a lot of it is what we call signposting, so they will signpost somebody who has come through their door to the Housing Advice Service to get that. They are offering different types of services, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

In turn the Housing Advice Service would signpost to Andium or another service.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Absolutely, yes. They are working very closely with Andium, yes, absolutely. The other thing I would just very quickly say, the good thing about Citizens Advice Bureau is as much as it is funded by Government it is not perceived as Government. There are people who have issues with regard to walking through the front door of C.L.S., a Government department and would prefer to do it in a more anonymised way. I think that is the advantage of Citizens Advice Bureau.

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:**

I would say that there is a lot of co-ordination between the Housing Advice Service, Citizens Advice, Shelter Trust and the Salvation Army; they work together. That is the great thing about having the Housing Advice Service, that there is the co-ordination and the networks exist and the right people are talking and are getting the right support, whereas previously there was not a Housing Advice Service in Government to provide that. We now have a central sort of port of call where people can go for housing advice but also the signposting into that from other services as well in supporting.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I am pleased to hear that there is co-ordination. Yes, can you provide us with an update on the use of modern methods of construction and prefabricated homes? Are there any ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Sure, yes. Yes, obviously we have Limes going up right now, which is using new methods of construction and the great news about that is it has shortened the delivery time. This may not sound like a huge amount of time but it is 6 to 8 months, so that is a significant improvement, which is really good; that is ongoing. We had an innovation hub, a couple of meetings were set up on that front. I am just reading some quick notes here. We had a smart construction summit as well. We are going to see, I think, some public announcements made in September-October later on this year in connection with how all of that area is moving forward because it relates around productivity, it is about resilience. We have seen issues in the construction industry already and it is also talking around about the zero carbon areas as well. There is a lot of work being done in that area at the moment and I think we will see some public announcements made in September-October this year around how all of that is moving forward.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

The innovation hub consists of ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

The innovation hub expert.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

The innovation hub was a commitment that was made in the *Modern Methods of Construction: Housing Delivery Innovation* report that was published as part of the Chief Minister's 100-Day Action Plan. That was about recognising the different roles across the sector from education to regulation, policy, supply chain, construction sector and trades, that this is a whole system that needs to work together in order to be able to truly innovate. The idea of the hub is that it is basically a convening power to bring these areas together to see how we can enhance collaboration in innovation and in that really it is I am looking at the skills and supply-chain barriers and regulatory barriers along the way. Each part has a specific role to play to support construction sector innovation.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

You indicated some of it will come out later on but do you get a feel that the recent demise of some building firms will have the effect of increasing prices to you, as Minister for Housing and Communities, for innovation?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is a good question. I do not know, I hope not. Obviously what we have seen is major inflation, so there is naturally going to be an increase in building costs. In fact the reason a number of these construction players failed was because their costs were going ahead of some fixed-term deals that they have done, so they ran out of money very, very quickly. Those conditions are obviously changing, there are smaller players who are currently in the market who have not failed and who may well take up that space. I just see it, it is a market change, a change in the market at the moment. Yes, there is always a risk but I think we have to trust the market a bit and that other players will come forward, as things go forward. Andium did a great job whereby they obviously had Camerons on their Ann Street site and they managed to swap that over to using ROK Construction without any delays. There is clearly people talking to each other within the industry; they are able to work these things out.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Do you envisage the construction industry, if you like, coming up with fixed-term prices as we have done in the past?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is a really good question. Right now I would say no because I certainly, as a businessperson, would say, how could you do that? There would have to be some flex in there. Until we start seeing inflation decline I mean I do not know how you could do a fixed-term contract. We are where we are, as it were; we are in unprecedented times. High finance costs, high inflation rates, that has

nothing to do with competition within the market; that is just market conditions which are going to impact on pricing. Sorry, just to come back to this point about modern methods of construction and speed - I think Natasha has alluded to this - is this is about we shorten the timeframe down, we do not need as many people as well on site, so that helps us as well. We have just become much more efficient and in some ways it is the industry reacting to current market conditions. Recently the British-Irish Council came over here and we sort of gave them a little tour around The Limes. We had some very high-level individuals and they were very, very impressed by the activities that are currently ongoing on this Island and, hopefully, taking them back to their jurisdictions.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

The Limes started before this term of office, did it not?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It did, it did, but in terms of speed, in terms of coming out of the ground it has only been in the last year it has come out of the ground.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, things are going up very fast.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Moving on to your empty homes project, we saw you have attended a conference in the U.K. on it and maybe you could comment on that.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Do you know what was so interesting about that was just how many people attended it from so many different jurisdictions, from Scotland, from Ireland, from Northern Ireland, from all sorts of places? It is gradually coming up on people's radar that this is a resource that is untapped. However, what we also recognise is it is very new, what you do and how do you get properties back into circulation again, which is the challenge because a lot of times it is down to individual, the property. But I think what we would say is we are doing a lot of work in this and I am just going to have a quick look through. Sorry, I have got a few notes here about this. One is I know we are meeting with the Constables to talk about the rates and how we can get more information through the rates system and I think that will be an upcoming meeting with you. But also I think what we also need to recognise is there is different categories of vacant homes. There are homes which have been abandoned, there are homes that are locked up in family conflicts. There also is an issue, we have now found

out, around wills and succession and we know of one property in particular whereby it has simply been abandoned and right now there is nothing anybody can do about that at all. It is just sitting there and really nice, it could be a really good family home or a really good plot and it is just sitting there because we do not have the mechanism to do something about it. People have talked about compulsory purchase; maybe that is our next step in these particular instances to go through. But what I would say before I put the frighteners on the Minister for Housing and Communities is going to go and put a compulsory notice on, we do have to go through the States Assembly before we can apply compulsory purchase notices and do things. But, as I said, there are a number of things we can do, right now we are still early days in all of this and triaging our way through. I think the numbers right now are we have got 258 homes reported to us. We have been on 104 site visits. We are doing an awful lot of work in the background to try and establish a pattern to all of this. I think there is huge opportunity here but we have to do the groundwork in it first.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I have got a couple of points to make. Firstly, I think compulsory purchase is one thing but the States, as an owner of their own property, would look a bit farcical if we then decided to purchase marked property when we do not do anything with our own; I shall leave that there. But more importantly as well it is not only about vacant homes or should be about vacant properties per se because there are properties and there is a debate in relation to - and so I would like your comment on this - what is used for employment or retail but then nobody wants it for employment or retail, so what do we do about those? I walk up and down Pier Road and there are clearly properties there. There is clearly some within the bounds of the sort of inner of St. Helier; what do we do about those?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That is a good question. I think as a previous planner you will talk about commercial usage and that concern, I think, in the Bridging Island Plan about making sure some properties do remain. We need a certain square footage of commercial properties, as opposed to converting them all into homes. Sorry, go on, Natasha, you are much more versed on it than I am.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I think that is a good point well made, particularly at the ground-floor level where you have got empty shops and things like that but do not want to see them easily converted into residential uses because that then constrains the vitality of the town centre. In the case of wider vacant properties and that in itself being a wasted resource, I think planning requirements or no planning requirements, that is an issue that I think is of concern. But that is obviously limiting supply in the more commercial sector than the housing, so for that reason the Minister is not focusing on the homes. We have had a couple of non-residential uses reported through the service, which of course we will look at. In relation to the condition of those properties as well, particularly in St. Helier, these buildings can start

to look particularly rundown, that then degrades the quality of our urban environment and I would say that is a Minister for the Environment area that he may wish to look further into himself.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

To what extent do you feel the level of resourcing and the manpower within Government departments generally are sufficient to progress the timely developments and implementation of joined-up housing policy, which you aim to implement, such as the empty home service and the residential tenancy law reform proposals?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

If you had just asked me this question 12 months ago I would say we are totally under-resourced. I think 12 months on Natasha is starting to build a team. We have got Jack on board with us as a newcomer, an old newcomer, as it were, and we are resourcing the vacant homes. Obviously in this day and age we have got to be very careful when it comes to how many people are employed by the States of Jersey, but in terms of resourcing now I think we are in a far, far better place than we were 12 months ago.

[12:15]

I am confident that we have a much better ability to deliver. I think the areas where we still need probably more resourcing is in the Housing Advice Service and I know that is an ongoing issue which we need to get that more up to speed. I think we cannot underestimate that people want to see people and I think we have to recognise that. It is the front-line services that really matter with regard to resourcing, almost more - I hate to say - than the back office because the back office in terms of policy delivery is really important as well but we just ...

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I think that is why I referred to having a telephone line at your office ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, they do, yes, exactly. But in terms of general resourcing I think we are in a good place. We have put in a bid for the next Government Plan to help us with the resourcing on that front. We need areas of expertise and one that Natasha mentioned to me the other day is in economics; we could have some more input from that side of our policy-making. It is areas which in the past maybe we did not prioritise or push it off the scale but now we are developing a long-term housing strategy. I think these are areas which we really need some more resource on.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

We spoke of and talking about empty homes once again and you mentioned there were some situations where it is impossible to move on because of legal constraints. Do you envisage bringing any law changes to enable those situations to be ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I personally would love to but I am not sure it is even within my power to do that, but I think absolutely we ...

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

In terms of giving instructions to Law Officers.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

To Law Officers, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

That would be the next stage.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

What we need to do is, from our report that we will be publishing in the not too distant future, I think these are maybe some of the suggestions that we can make. I absolutely agree with you, I think there are things which just have not been looked at, in the same way the vacant homes has not been looked at as an issue. Lots of people have spoken about these things but never nailed down what the exact issues are and how we are going to resolve them. I think if we are serious about it, absolutely. I see it in housing; the 1946 law is no longer appropriate in 2023. I think we need to recognise that and if we are not updating our laws appropriately we need to make sure that we encourage those people who can do do so.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Within your delivery plan we notice that you state your work with the Minister for Treasury and Resources to identify the most appropriate route to secure adequate long-term funding for the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Team in the Government Plan coming up. Is the funding on path to being secured, do you think?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I am going to be very bold and say yes. Sorry, we have a little grid on it because there is currently a bit of a bunfight going on around funding in various areas. I think the level of funding that we require in the grand scheme of things is relatively small. Obviously you never say never and when

I am not in the room maybe things have changed, but right now I feel like we have secured as much as we can, the funding that we require, I would like to think. Natasha might confirm that.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Do you think you will be able to convince States Members when it comes to the vote for your particular ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Everybody is concerned about housing, it is number one topic for everybody. If you want stuff done, you want things done you need to resource it and you need to spend money doing it. Do not come and beat me up and say well you cannot have the funding and then expect the same level of delivery. You are not going to get it; the 2 do not match. I have got to walk the talk and I have also got to walk it as well as talk it, yes.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

We will change topics a little bit, I think, now and talk about homelessness. We note in your delivery plan that the new homelessness data will be published in quarter 1 of 2023. Could you provide an update as to when this data will be made available?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Okay. It is a little bit more complex. Can I pass you over to Jack because this is Jack's speciality, as it were, so he can give you an update on it?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:**

The homelessness strategy, it is sort of across community. It is part of working between governance, between the voluntary community sector, between the housing providers. One element within the ministerial's commitment there is to deliver the ministerial actions that were set out in response. We will be publishing data from the Housing Advice Service in the coming weeks and about the types of queries that they are dealing with in terms of homelessness and so on. There is also a bigger piece going on around the homelessness cluster, which brings together all these stakeholders involved in provision about what data we can provide; that is also ongoing at the moment. We have the house data and then we will have the wider data coming out at a point in the future, but that is obviously working with those organisations to make sure that the data protection issues are dealt with, that we do not double-count and so on. It is part of putting data up there slowly and building upon that and so then we have a fuller picture of homelessness in the Island.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Okay. Yes, I think that is as much as we want to know.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Do you have much evidence of sofa-surfing?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:**

By its nature, it is very difficult to identify. I think there are various vulnerable and unsustainable insecure housing situations in the Island of which sofa-surfing is just one of them. Thankfully, we now have the definition of homelessness, so that now falls within ... when the Housing Advice Service can categorise that and they can support people in those situations. I think, again, having a Housing Advice Service where people can go and get support and advice and be directed to the right services or housing providers can certainly help address those situations. I think it is also people do not necessarily always think that they are in a homeless situation when they are sofa-surfing or when they do live in the Island under threat of eviction. That is all homelessness, a form of homelessness, it is about getting that message across that you are, potentially, going to be homeless or threatened with it and so that you should be going to the right agencies to help you secure more sustainable accommodation.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Do you regularly meet with the providers of the shelters? Do you regularly meet with them?

**Policy Principal, Strategic Policy, Planning and Performance:**

There is a regular cluster and the last cluster was on Friday. I meet with the providers regularly. The Housing Advice Service would be in, I would say, daily contact, if not weekly. There is a lot of cross-working that goes on with all of the providers. I think one of the great things about the homelessness strategy that was 2021 is that really it gave everybody a sense of the importance of working together. It sort of brought everyone to the table and start to build a more trusting and greater engagement and we need to continue building on that. While there has been lots of good work going on, I think there is so much more still to be done with that.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Within your delivery plan, Minister, you mentioned you have made a housing data intelligence working group in 2023. Has this ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

That has not been progressed. I put my hand up and say that has not been progressed yet. I do not know if Natasha can give me any further update on that but as far as I am aware we have not gone into that one yet.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

To clarify, we took a slightly different approach to the implementation of that one, so we focused specifically on a project, first and foremost, without establishing a working group, which was not felt initially necessary. The project specifically has been about extracting data from the planning system, about the number of planning permissions coming through the system, what type of housing that is providing, when they start on site and when they are completed because that is pretty fundamental basic data; that, as a specific project, has been ongoing. In terms of the wider data intelligence working group, again, we are just focusing more on our more pressing data needs. As we are looking into the progression of the long-term housing strategy we will be looking quite closely at the economic dimensions of housing data, for example. It is a more efficient approach, rather than establishing a large cross-government working group, at the moment we are focusing on our most pressing housing data requirements to make sure that we are able to use that to inform policy.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Picking up on key worker housing provision, how many key worker homes have been delivered so far and how many more will be provided during this year?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

The number is 130-odd, 138 I think it is in Andium at the moment. There is a piece of work going on with what we call the delivery unit internally and that is around working with Jersey Property Holdings who have a lot of accommodation there with key workers already in there and whether that can be work done with Andium Homes and whether we can marry those up. But, as I say, that is something which our delivery unit is currently working on internally to identify the demand because obviously that is one of the key bits. But also what we already have, identifying what we have, what we can use, what needs updating, et cetera, disposing and then we can go forward on that front. As I say, Andium are already providing. Did I get that number right?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, so they are way over 100, the combination between Andium and Westaway Court that was developed by Government, have been delivered earlier this year, which is obviously providing vital supply to housing community services immediately. In the longer term there is a particular Corporate Services piece of work to look at the definition of a key worker and what sort of subsidy that should mean, recognising that it is part of an employment package offer that Government gives to key workers and then translating that into a sustainable delivery of key worker housing in Jersey, which, as the Minister suggested, we would be looking to work and partner with Andium Homes to provide a service which ...

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

There is a risk of creating a separate social strata, potentially, to the detriment of local people.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No, I totally recognise that comment because I think it is one of these things you can get a bit ahead of yourself. Having this conversation this morning whereby you are so focused on key worker accommodation that you start to forget about people who are in housing need in Jersey already who are in rental stress. I think it is an absolutely valid point. We cannot forget those people who are in rental stress right now. The key worker bit has to sit alongside that and recognise that.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

Of course you have got a situation where people are brought in - and I have evidenced this - as in what we used to call a (j) cat and the people working alongside them had no housing rights and those people did. I think that is quite a critical thing, is it?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

As I say, the people in Corporate Services ... the piece of work that is ultimately about employee benefits when you boil it right down, though their focus has, I think, been on fairness and sustainability, so hence they are taking the approach that they are to develop a policy there that can better reflect that.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

One final one ...

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

I have got a final question I wanted to ask of Natasha but David has one I noticed.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Yes, let us bring David in.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Thank you and I cannot see you any more but never mind, due to my ignorance. In establishing the number of key worker properties you want, how does it work? Are you under pressure from the likes of the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister for Children and Education to provide these, because the accommodation is obviously a key part of their own problems, is it not? Providing certain numbers or how does it work?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes. There is a need for individual departments to identify their strategic workforce planning requirements. It is very difficult to know beyond the jobs that you have vacant today as to what needs you are going to have in the future and who is going to fill those roles and what roles may become vacant in the intervening period. It is quite a challenge to develop a long-term projection of individual service requirements because ultimately what our public services should be working towards is not having a dependency on bringing key workers into the Island. But, as the Minister suggested, the delivery unit team are working with individual departments to identify both their near-term requirements and their medium to longer-term requirements for key worker housing.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Thank you. Thanks.

**Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:**

It was something that Natasha said before, so I have flipped back a little bit. You mentioned before about looking at planning applications to see where things are coming online. What about those that have got planning permission but nothing has been done with those sites?

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, that is part of the dataset. It is about combining your planning and building control data. Your planning tells you what you get planning permission for and your building control certificates tell you what you are building and then there will be a space in between that where if somebody has planning permission and it is not being built. We always make an assumption when we are looking at housing supply projections, on average how many planning permissions end up getting built out? You will get situations where somebody might have 3 planning permissions on the same property and that is part of the need to clean that data up before we start saying some of this.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I am just going to go off and ask you for the status on Airbnb.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Right. The status, as far as I am aware, is one of they are still going through, the law has not changed, so whole homes still need to be, what we call, re-categorised is I think the best way I could put it. But I do think there is also at the same time a recognition that there is a challenge here because obviously on the one hand we are seeing hotels shutting down and we still have to worry about the visitor economy. I think there is a recognition of how can we maybe nuance this a bit more? How can we think about this? Obviously on the one hand, Islanders want accommodation and they need homes, so we need to provide them homes. On the other hand, we do need

accommodation for our visitor economy and how do we spread the circle? I think there is a bit of work that needs to be done in that space.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

A lot of people have converted homes to have an access for flats or rooms which they let ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Which is fine, which is ...

[12:30]

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

The Minister for the Environment is currently working on supplementary planning guidance that identifies the requirement in the planning and building law that any dwelling used for short-term holiday lets, be it whole or part of a dwelling, technically requires planning permission under the planning and building law definition of development. The Minister for the Environment is working up a supplementary planning guide that provides greater clarity on the areas that we have concern about, a loss of housing stock to the local market and areas where perhaps there would be less concern, to make sure that these are properly guided through the planning process.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Did you feel that since, I think it was your announcement probably, that any of these properties have come back to local people to access?

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

I do, I know of one but I am not sure what the overall number is like. Yes, an interesting situation but ...

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I think what I was trying to understand whether your comment created ...

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

It certainly created awareness, that is for sure, and I think this is where supplementary planning guidance ... I think this is where I talk about my residential tenancy law and it is kind of making laws that are able to adapt to changing market conditions. I think far too often we write laws and they kind of get set in aspic and what we need to be doing is thinking about the wider picture and going: how do we accommodate the changing market conditions but at the same time have a little bit of a

handle on them and Government does not get lost behind? I think, yes, nimbleness of Government is one of my long-term policies for sure, yes, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

That means we look forward to a raft of law changes coming up.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, yes, yes. Well, maybe that is what has to happen. We need to be adaptive, we need to make our laws adaptive, that is for sure. It is not about Wild West. Yes, but at the same time, as I say, recognising all the tensions, we are a 9 by 5 Island with a certain level of built environment and with a large population, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Yes, we need to be considering that.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Minister, thank you for your attendance today.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

No problem. That is great, my pleasure, thank you.

**The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

I call the meeting to a close.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Yes, thank you, thank you.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Thank you very much. Thank you.

**The Minister for Housing and Communities:**

Thank you, David.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Thank you.

[12:32]