

# STATES OF JERSEY

## Health, Social Security and Housing Scrutiny Panel Housing Transformation Programme Sub-Panel

**THURSDAY, 26th July 2012**

**Panel:**

Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Peter (Chairman)

Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen

Deputy J.M. Le Bailly of St. Mary

Senator A. Breckon

Ms. A. Davies (Panel Adviser)

**Witness:**

Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel

**Also Present:**

Ms. F. Scott (Scrutiny Officer)

[12:00]

**Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Peter (Chairman):**

Good morning, and thank you very much for taking the time from your busy day to come and speak to us, we greatly appreciate it. We will start, for the record, by introducing ourselves. I am Deputy Kristina Moore; I am the Chairman of this sub-panel.

**Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen:**

I am Deputy James Reed, sub-panel member.

**Deputy J.M Le Bailly of St. Mary:**

Deputy John Le Bailly, sub-panel member.

**Ms. A. Davies (Panel Adviser):**

I am Abigail Davies from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

**Senator A. Breckon:**

Senator Alan Breckon, panel member.

**Ms F. Scott (Scrutiny Officer):**

Fiona Scott, Scrutiny Officer.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I am Colin Russell; I am chairman of the States Tenants' Forum Panel.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Thank you. I am just being reminded that there is a paper there to explain the privilege under which we hold this meeting. If you want to take a couple of moments to familiarise yourself, please do. It should have been explained briefly. So if we start in general terms: we are interested to know what you think of the role of social housing is for.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Well, social housing is there to help those people who find it difficult to house themselves in the normal situation. Can you hear me all right?

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Yes, we can, just about.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Okay, sorry. Yes, social housing has an important role in Jersey, as it does in any democracy, so to speak. It helps to enable people who find it difficult to get housed under normal circumstances to actually be housed in decent homes. The role that the Housing Department play is vital to that purpose. As tenants over the years, there have been various tenants' associations formed and ...

**Senator A. Breckon:**

I should declare an interest: I was a former chairman of S.T.A.G. (States Tenants' Action Group) many years ago.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Okay, all right. Yes, was that the States Tenants' Action Group?

**Senator A. Breckon:**

Yes.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Okay. Sorry, do I carry on talking, or do I wait for questions?

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

No, please do. Yes.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes? Okay.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Please do. We will direct you with our questions, but feel free to continue.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

The States tenants formed various associations and residents' groups over the years, and in 2007, through the active Tenant Participation Scheme that was brought in place by the Housing Department, it was decided to bring these groups together to form a more proactive group to be involved with policymaking decisions, so then the States Tenants' Forum Panel was actually created from that. What we actually do is, we

have representatives from various residents' groups on the panel and we actually discuss with the senior housing management team proposals, policies that are brought forward that will affect us as tenants. We look at that and we suggest any changes that might be required for that, or if we realise something is going to seriously impact on the tenants' quality of life. We have a very good working relationship now, built up over many years, and we have established, as I say, a very good working relationship and they bring us all their policies. Before they actually publish them, they bring them to us.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

At what point were you introduced to the Housing transformation Programme?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

That was 2009. We got involved in 2009. We met Professor Christine Whitehead when she came in to do the report on social housing in Jersey, and in 2010, as a result of her report, the Tenants' Forum Panel actually produced a questionnaire to go out to 4,400 tenants asking for their views on the proposed changes that could take place for social housing in Jersey. We collated all those responses from the tenants that responded. We only had a 6 per cent response, which was 264 responses from 4,400, but we were told at the time that that is a pretty good response for a survey; we were not sure. I was disappointed, I would have hoped there had been more response, but from that, it enabled us to look at the main concerns that were expressed by tenants as to the proposed changes that were envisaged to actually bring social housing up into the 21st century, because social housing in Jersey is lagging behind the times. It needs a big transformation inasmuch that work needs to be done on properties. We recognise that work needs to be done on properties as States tenants, but we also accept the fact that there are financial constraints placed on all government departments, Housing being one of them, and they can only go so far. We work closely with the Housing Department senior management team, so we are acutely aware of the financial constraints imposed on them. So it did fit the tenants' needs that changes needed to be done in the way it has been proposed, that they become an arms-length management organisation in such that you separate the stock from ownership.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Can I ask, does membership of the forum include tenants from the housing trusts or private sector?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

No, this is only States tenants. The housing trusts at the moment are separate from the States tenants, and the plan is to bring them all under one umbrella in the future.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Is there currently any forum for those tenants that are accommodated within either the housing trusts or the private sector?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Not that I am aware of, no, because I am not aware of any groups on any housing trust properties at all, but that is because they are all under separate management because you have trusts all split into different groups. Different trusts control different areas,

different properties, so to speak, and so it is for them to have their own residents' groups. If I can just explain how residents' groups get formed: residents' groups usually get formed through issues of concern of tenants in that area, if there are anti-social behaviour problems or lack of maintenance. Then you get a group of individual tenants getting together and they decide and will do something about it, so they form a group, an association. If there are not any issues in any areas, these groups possibly do not get formed. I know last year I wrote as chairman of the Tenants' Forum Panel, I wrote to 10 separate States tenants associations inviting any of their committee members to join the Tenants' Forum Panel; not one responded, which was rather disappointing, because we need an influx of new blood representing those different areas, satellite groups, so to speak, so that we can actually get an overall picture of what is happening on other estates. We have got a very good representation at the moment but I wanted to increase the broader aspect or the broader appeal. Whether these groups are quite satisfied with what they are doing at the moment and do not want to get involved in the more serious issues of policymaking decisions; I was not sure as to why no one came forward, but we did write to them and invite them.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

How would you elicit information from housing trust tenants about their set of circumstances and whether they are satisfied or not with the accommodation and the circumstances that they find themselves in?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

It is not within our remit to do that because we only act on behalf of States tenants. We have got no remit to get involved on the trust side at all.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

How well do you feel as a group that tenants' needs are met by social housing as it currently stands in Jersey?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

As a group, from the representation we have on the Tenants' Forum Panel (we have 12 active members who attend meetings) we feel that it is very well represented, and we feel that responses are dealt with in a very timely manner. The senior management staff at the Housing Department do attend our meetings; we can request them to attend a meeting and they will attend a meeting. Any issues we have they will take them away and address those issues and they will respond back at the next meeting in 6 weeks' time. So we have got a very good relationship with them and they actually respect the Tenants' Forum Panel as being a group that brings forward very good suggestions and ideas and different views that they possibly had not thought of, and they welcome those sort of refreshing ideas from States tenants.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Do you see eligibility as an issue at the moment? The criteria or the gateway that allocates housing is quite narrow. Do you have a desire among the forum to widen the eligibility criteria?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

There has been a view expressed about widening the eligibility criteria and I think that is part of the White Paper proposal as well, to look at that. But it is something that did come back in our survey, as well, that the respondents to that survey did want it widened, and so there is going to be a social housing unit set up in the scheme process as well, which will work very closely with the gateway to affordable housing. So when that comes to looking at that in detail, that will come back to the Tenants' Forum Panel as well, because they will not move on policy decisions unless it comes through us. We have also got a logo we attach to their policymaking decisions that they can actually put on there; that it has come through us. So we are always open to suggestions and open to ideas, which we will look at, research, and report back to the senior management team at Housing.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

While you mention the survey, do you have the results of the survey? Would it be possible to share them with us?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I have the results of the survey.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

You have helpfully made a submission for us, but perhaps ...

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

This is the survey; it was broken down into the different sections of questions that were asked, but I only brought one copy with me, I am afraid.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

If you would be kind enough to render it to us, or Fiona here, we could make some copies.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Okay.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Would you like that back?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

No, that is all right. I have got another one on the computer anyway, so I have got one.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Okay, that is very helpful, thank you.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

You spoke earlier about your views on the role of social housing and who it should be provided for. We have also heard this morning that the Minister for Housing, referring to certain tenants that are now on relatively high incomes but are still remaining within social housing. What are your views on who should be provided and whether or not social housing should be considered to be more of a stepping stone rather than a permanent residence or permanent accommodation for the individual?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes, I think the answer to that is that you need to look at the current financial situation at the moment and the cost of private accommodation right across the board, because in the proposals we have not touched on yet is the proposed rental increase, to bring it up to 10 per cent below the fair rental prices. Those tenants who can afford to pay more, they can afford to pay more. But those who are on income support, they will not see any difference at all; it will not impact on them at all because the increase will be soaked up by income support payments. Those that are on what you may call a relatively high income, does that mean that if you get to a certain income you have to leave housing? Because it may be a disincentive to actually improve your quality of life; if people are threatened with being evicted if they get to a certain level of income, would that encourage anyone to better their lives? You have to look at this from a far broader aspect, that there is income support there to help people who are unable economically to support themselves sufficiently. They may have a job, but their income is below the level to sustain themselves sufficiently. If we move toward the situation where people's incomes are now assessed to establish whether you still qualify for housing, that would be a different issue. That has not been suggested at all or even discussed, because as far as we are aware, there is nowhere in the proposal that actually suggests any tenants in housing at the moment who are assessed on their present level of income that may have risen above the criteria for eligibility for social housing, will continue to remain in housing. For anyone to come up with the idea that if you now receive a certain amount of income as an existing tenant you will be moved out of social housing, how long would you be out of social housing, or your income might drop and you might have to get back in again, because these are uncertain times.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Those are very interesting points.

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

Having discussed that with you, the Minister for Housing, there has been suggestion that if people who would be paying the 90 per cent rental would be asked to move, they would just stay at that level and pay the 90 per cent, but it would give them an alternative, possibly, paying the 10 per cent difference if they wanted and getting to a better location in the private sector. There has been no indication that there would be forced eviction.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I think once it comes up to the fair rent level of 90 per cent, 10 per cent below the fair rent levels, then people will have a conscious choice: if they wanted to move to a different premises and pay the full rent, that is entirely their choice. What I was reading into what Deputy Reed was just saying there was that there might be a possibility that people would be asked to leave, and we do not want that. We would not want that situation. Fine by choice: if people want to leave, that is entirely their choice if they want to do that, but I have not had any indication that would be forced on them, to move.

[12:15]

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

With regard to your survey, I do not know if you might have asked this question, did you have any indication from any of the tenants that if they could have achieved their own property at a realistic price, that they would be inclined to going into buying their own home rather than renting from the States?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

If I could have the survey back, I will be able to answer that question. Thank you. It is in here somewhere; something similar was asked.

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

We would be talking about ...

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

You are asking about home ownership?

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

Yes, we would be talking about realistically affordable homes at probably half the current value for first time buyers, in the region of £200,000 to £250,000.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

The question that was asked is: "Is purchasing a home with some financial assistance something which you believe is realistic for you?" This was a question to the tenants. 21 per cent responded and said they did believe that it would be realistic to purchase; 71 per cent said they did not believe it would be realistic to purchase. 8 per cent did not express an opinion. So it was asked in the survey and you will get the results of the survey.

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

So there is a possibility there of reducing States tenants by probably 25 per cent if we had the right price on the market for ownership?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

That is right, yes, for ownership.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Do you think that the issues or proposals contained in the White Paper will tackle the areas that matter most to the tenants?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

It will, because the main problem that has been recognised is the financial constraints on the department. The Housing Department is very keen and eager to do as much work as possible, and that has been shown in how they have moved forward with fiscal stimulus funding on projects that have always been on the backburners but they have never had the money for it. They have brought those forward to take advantage of the fiscal stimulus fund and that, in itself, has helped the economy and the construction industry as well, which was in trouble as well (but that is a different issue). So they have always seen the need to improve properties and also to recognise and build properties as well; they need new stock. They just do not need to refurbish what they have; they also need land for new stock to be built. One project which I

know is going to come on line is the La Collette flats. As a tenant, I find it odd that that building is a site of special interest, or something attached to it. I think they would love to knock it down and start again but someone has put this order on it and it cannot be demolished. To me, it is an ugly building and I think it is a waste of States money that we have to comply with this special order just to keep something that is well past its sell-by date. It should go, and have nice property put in there in its place. But that is another issue.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

I would just like to pick up on, because you mentioned it earlier, the 90 per cent rent level. There are 2 parts to the question. First of all, what discussion was there between the Housing Department and yourself with regard to what that rent level should be, whether it should be to 70, 80, 90 or even 100? I will stop there.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

When it was part of the original proposal coming forward, again, it was explained that to be able to pay for all the modernisation work, that the rents that are charged in States properties at the moment have been subsidised for many years and over the years they have never been put up level with inflation; they have always been kept below inflation because they did not want to create another inflation problem, raising the rents too much. So it has always been pegged back slightly, but over the period of years, it has never caught up, so what we are doing now, we have got to play catch-up. In all the years it has not been put up, in recognition of the inflation rates at the time. The reason why you have to increase the rents, and for some people it is going to be a 20 per cent increase, going from 70 to 90, and that will be phased in over a number of years depending on the tenant's ability to pay. Because the Housing Department are making it available to any tenants that if they feel that they are not going to be able to make these payments they can actually apply for an assessment, a means test, so to speak, within the department. Then the increase in payments will be staged over 10 years, so it is not like a sudden hit or anything like that.

**Senator A. Breckon:**

Was some of the rent levels because of the condition of the properties and the fact that they were not maintained? They still had metal windows and no proper heating systems and no proper insulation, so the fact that they could not put the rents up was because they were not comparable with the market, really, some of them?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

That is right. Some rents are far lower than 70 per cent of the market rate at the moment, so they will not be going anywhere near the 90 per cent. They might just creep up a little bit, but what they will do is, those properties that can be refurbished, once they are refurbished, the prices will slowly creep up to match what that sort of property should be charged for at fair rent.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

The rent levels set will be based on that property and not on an average property value?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes, it will be based on that property. Yes, because they have estates of all different levels of need of modernisation.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Given that information that you clearly have, are you content that the 90 per cent rate is fair and the right thing to do?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

In all respect, if we take it to affect the general public as a whole, we have to say it is fair. It is not fair to say that if you are States tenant you should be subsidised in your rent. I do not think that is fair at all, because it gives out the wrong message about States tenants; it gives out a very negative message. We are all victims of the economy downturn together, and so it would seem unfair that States tenants are actually gaining some benefit from it through hidden subsidies. It just gives us all a level playing field.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

At the moment, we get the impression that there is quite a number of States tenants who choose not to go through the means test procedure and therefore just pay the full rate of rent chargeable on that property. Do you foresee that more people will go through the means test process as part of this 90 per cent situation, and do you feel that tenants are happy with that?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

The means test procedure is not available through Housing at the moment. It will not come into effect until the new changes come into force, and in 2013 tenants will be contacted by the Housing Department to inform them of a possible increase in the rent, however large or however small, and they will be invited to contact the Housing Department if they are going to find it difficult to meet those payments, because there is always the situation that the ones who will not be financially impacted on are those who are currently receiving income support. Those who are not receiving income support may be at the level (we do not know) that they are just above receiving income support, so they could go 2 ways, they can go 2 routes. They can go to the Housing Department and get means tested, or they can go to Social Security and do an income support application; again, that is a means test. So there are 2 routes to take. No one really knows what level of income are you eligible for income support; it is down to individual circumstances, the size of your family and things like that. So it is very difficult to say that if you receive X amount, this is when you get income support.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

You are confident that that procedure is satisfactory?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

It is a satisfactory procedure and I think a very robust procedure as well. It is there, it is going to be in place, as I say, from 2013 onwards, and we are also in discussion with the Housing Department about coming up with some sliding scale of actual rents at the moment, and what they could be in a couple of years' time, so people can see that and gauge it themselves to save having a shock, and just try and inform them of what the possible increases, if any increases, will be.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

In your submission, you explained some concerns about the introduction of fair rent and the impact that will have on States tenants who do not currently claim income support. Could you elaborate a little bit more about what those concerns are?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I just wanted to highlight that we are aware of it and we wanted to make sure that that is definitely a major part of it, because we feel it is important to recognise that States tenants do need a way of feeling secure in their home and feeling not so worried about the financial implications in the future, because then you get all the doubts arising, you get all the whispering going on about this and that. Because what we want to do, we want to say that this transitional process, the transformation programme for social housing is very good. It just needs closer looking at and looking after it to make sure that nothing important is left out, that something is not pushed to the side. That is why I highlighted that, because I want to make sure that definitely stays there, that there is not any bargaining and it is moved away, or anything like that.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Thank you.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Are you aware whether the protection you spoke about before against the increase in the proposed rental levels will be available to private sector or housing trust tenants in the same way that it has been suggested that it would be available to States tenants?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Seeing as the housing trusts will be coming under the same scheme, I should imagine it will just be across the board; I think it will be across the board.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

You believe that protection will be available?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes. Because I think it would be wrong to stigmatise those who are on housing trusts and leave States tenants, because I think that is the whole idea, that it is all under one umbrella.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Just finally, on this determining of whether it is the 90 per cent, 80 per cent or 100 per cent, much talk has been made or much mention has been made of the words: "Hidden subsidy." Did any discussion revolve around the 100 per cent level? In other words, to ensure that there is a fair and equitable system, whether it be housing trust, private sector or States, that actually a fair rental value at 100 per cent level should be charged?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

No, I was never party to any discussion involving 100 per cent level being charged to States tenants.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

So am I under the impression that it was decided that some hidden subsidy should remain?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Ten per cent. Yes, it is just that 10 per cent seems to be set at what they call a fair rental level. Because they use 100 per cent as the market rate, and so they just decided on 10 per cent less than that as a fair rental level. You see, it may impact on the private sector rental as well, because we do not have a housing regulator, and that is all part of this proposal as well, that a housing regulator be brought into play, as a result of this proposal. That means all private landlords will come under some scrutiny, for want of a better word, as well, as to what rents they charge. So that would impact on everything, through income support, as well.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

You support the regulation of the private sector?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Did you believe that to be a priority, or one of the first steps that should be taken, once a regulator is in place?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I do not know if you could pre-empt this. I think it has all got to flow together, I think it is all part of the package. If this is accepted as a way forward, this will be part of the package to be looked at, that it will be borne out of this, the housing regulator. Who the housing regulator will be, I do not know, it has to be decided; I think it is another issue.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Interestingly enough, what I was supposed to be doing was looking at the responses to the Green Paper that Evolve analysed, an English company, and it seemed to me that the official comment that was written by the majority of States tenants, I believe, was that they really were not necessarily supportive of having an independent regulator. They believed regulation was important, but they tended to point to other providers and the need for regulation in those areas rather than necessarily within the area and accommodation and the provider that they come under. Would that be fair?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

That would be fair, but everyone has their own views of housing regulation. If you have regulation you need someone to monitor it, to regulate it. I do not see how you can have regulations without a regulator who set those rules in place.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

What would you expect the regulator to regulate?

[12:30]

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I think regulation on the terms of the quality of home that you are renting and for the right price. You would hope there would be a band of what you would say decent home standards of properties. They have to meet that band or they cannot charge that rate of rent. What is being left behind is the private rental sector in all this. This possibly is moving towards that, and people are so keen to get into social housing or trust because they are more protected because they know they are being treated fairly.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

What if, and obviously you are talking ifs and buts, the regulator could determine that there is an assessment regularly undertaken with regards to the tenants and the tenants whose incomes do improve and circumstances improve they are then encouraged to leave.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

That would be the case. That could happen.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

That would not necessarily cause a problem as long as it was fair?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

As long as it is fair. There is nothing to stop anyone setting up any sort of group or regulatory body if they are looking at particular issues. It is all does depend on what sort of support they get on whatever issues they are going to address.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

What about the cost of that regulator? Do you think that should be borne out of the rents that are payable?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Again, it all depends who takes on the role, the responsibility of regulator, and the funds of which budget it comes out of.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

As you anticipated in the medium term financial plan that has just been published, it will be in a States tenants' case, the Housing Department will be levied a charge that will, in effect, pay for the regulator.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes, again because we had not gone into too much depth on the housing regulator at all as to the financial aspects of it, who is going to pay for it and who is going to monitor it, who is going to run it because that had not been finalised at all.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

What about the Housing Association? Do you have a view on the department essentially becoming an arm's length organisation called the Housing Association?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

We do, yes, because the arm's length organisation or Housing Association is a far better way forward because it encompasses the great skill of the staff within the

Housing Department at the moment to do the job they want to do and it frees them up to deliver what the tenants are asking for. Again, that goes hand in hand with the financial capabilities of the department which if all this goes that are able to take out loans to do work on properties and to build new stock, then it enables them to move forward with that. We see it as very important because it involves a closer connection with the tenants in this arrangement as well as the Housing Association. The tenants are more actively involved than they are now.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Will there be a formal role for the tenants in that Association?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

There will be a formal role in that as well, yes. That is what is being proposed.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

In the deliberations, were you involved with any other considerations other than a Housing Association?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

In? Sorry, in other considerations?

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Instead of a Housing Association, maintaining the status quo, other options, are those suggested to you?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes, because that is in our survey. We put a lot of suggestions out and the one that came back mostly for was for the housing management organisation which is the Housing Association.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

You mentioned it would relieve the department of some of the constraints they work under at the moment. What do you see as the constraints that they work under at the moment?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

It is the budgetary constraints because they recognise they need to do the work but it is trying to identify the funds available and just work with the budget they have at the moment, to prioritise as much as possible what they can and cannot do. That can upset certain tenants because they feel their work is more important than anyone else's and so it is trying to keep everybody happy, but they can only do so much.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

One of the larger elements of the Housing Department situation will remain the same is the return that it makes to the Treasury once it is the Housing Association. Do you have a view on that return that Housing makes to the Treasury.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I think it is a case of the, I think, it is £24.5 million will be returned, something of that sort of figure. Again, if that stays the same and the rents go up, I do not know if it is a

pro rata that the rents go up then the return to Treasury goes up and keep level with it, but if the rents do up then £24.5 million that has to go back to the Treasury may remain the same but whether it will remain the same for ever after will be phased down over a period of years as things progress as to how the transformation stands up and stands on its own 2 feet.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

You mentioned that tenants were asked about their views for an alternative whether it is status quo, whether it is a housing association, what were the views of the Forum on what I call the Housing Trust model? It is the alternative social housing provider we know exists and it seems to be relatively successful. What did they feel the disadvantages as to following that particular model rather than necessarily creating a housing association?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

It was very difficult to pin down the reasons why they did not want to go for the Housing Trust situation. It was just they felt the housing management organisation, Housing Association, was far more attractive in what it offered, and it is more open. Social housing estates, it accepts all people that is possibly eligible for it. Housing trusts have slightly different eligibility criteria than the old way. Whether this will change through the gateway to housing, social housing unit, remains to be seen but just going back on past experiences from those people who responded and expressed a view, they were looking at the present set up of housing trusts and they felt far better staying with the Housing Department as States housing tenants. That is through choice.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Shall we move on and talk about the strategic housing unit? Who do you think should be responsible for running the strategic housing unit?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I think you need to find someone within the Housing Department's senior management team who is obviously well versed in all of the requirements to establish a social housing unit and to interlink with the Housing Association, and a population officer, I believe, as well will be working just to keep track of what the requirements are for social housing in Jersey.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Sorry, I will just rephrase the question. What are your views on having a Minister for Housing or the alternative which is not having one?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

We need a Housing Department because it is such a large entity on the Island, such a cost as well to the government. We do need political representation on the Housing Department, Housing Association as well for future reference. The Minister for Housing does an excellent job in representing not only the Housing Department but also the tenants' views as well because he is our political voice in the House because we can feedback information through the department of concerns and if he cannot deal with it internally, and there is an issue that, says, work is not being done, it would need money, I think it is the level of a Ministry that you need to take that proposition

to the House. I am talking about the present situation. The future situation, that can be addressed in the future as to the new format, as to how it goes about its business and whether we need certain such close political links, I do not know, but I do not think government want to lose total control of such an important body as the Housing Department or whatever its new format will be.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

In your experience, is there a benefit from having a Minister for Housing?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Absolutely, yes. Deputy Green is our third Minister for Housing. We started with Terry Le Main and Sean Power, and now we have Andrew Green. So we have had experience of different politicians coming through and I must say, they have all been very supportive of active tenant participation, very supportive.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Would you feel confident that your voice was being heard, as you said, and you were being actively advocated or on a political level if that politician in charge of housing became the Chief Minister, for example?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I should imagine it would, taking into account the bigger picture of it all, whether the ... so if the Minister for Housing became the Chief Minister, yes, like we suggested.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Rather than the Minister for Housing, say they removed the office of Minister for Housing ...

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Oh, I see. Yes.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

... and so the Strategic Housing Unit would be placed under the Chief Minister and so therefore he would become the person politically responsible for housing issues, and therefore the person that you would deal with, I guess.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes, well, I mean, we are quite capable of dealing with any politician, whatever level they are in the House. I mean, yes, I understand what you mean because if you are moving to ... the Social Housing Unit is planned to move to the Chief Minister's Office, Cyril le Marquand House. You know, that is the location. That is why I was a bit curious about the question about who is going to fund certain things about the regulatory side. I was not sure, you know, Social Housing Unit is still going to come out of the budget of ... yes, okay. All right. Yes, we are not sure yet.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

No, I do not think that is the level of detail that is going to work really quite ...

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I am not entirely sure either.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

You have described the role of the Social Housing Unit ... not Social Housing ... Strategic Housing Unit, excuse me, and do you feel that function can be performed by one person?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

It is ... I think it is a large responsibility, a large job. Whether you would need possibly one main administrator and possibly 2 other members of staff to back it up because it encompasses a large remit, I think, in that role. It is determining the future housing needs of the Island.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

How would you like to see the housing needs of the Island developed over the next 10 years?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Well, what we would like to see is new land identified for social housing projects and for, obviously, funding to be made available for those projects to become viable and it all comes down to ... you have the situation where St. Helier is getting over-burdened with social housing. It is ... the outer parishes seemed very reluctant to allow social housing in their parishes. That needs to be looked at and asked why there is possibly resistance to certain areas that are not used for social housing. Now I think it is just possibly the stigmas attached to social housing that may put people off from agreeing to like being part of a social housing community.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

What do you believe attracts people to wanting to be accommodated within a States social housing, rather than elsewhere?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Well, I think it is security of tenure is the main one and also as well, they know they are being charged fair rent and that maintenance issues are dealt with ... and usually people end up in social housing through financial circumstances beyond their control.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

So are you saying that if we were able to ensure that all the providers met those same standards, then it might encourage less people to seek to be accommodated within the social housing?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes, it is all to do with meeting the U.K. (United Kingdom) Decent Homes Standard, which is what the Housing Department are trying to achieve, through this transformation. This is what their target is, to bring all the homes, because ... there are only 74 per cent meeting that at the moment, so you know, we have to work to bring the others up to that standard as well. There are a lot of projects ongoing at the moment to try and achieve that, but their main constraint, as I have said in the past and I will repeat again, it has been their financial constraints that has held them back from doing what they need to do and so it is ... if all the providers of accommodation in Jersey met, a social ... a decent home standard allied to decent rent ... rental

charges, as well. That may ease the burden on social housing. You have private landlords and so on, they are in business. They are not social landlords.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Yeah but they are housing social tenants, and even some of those would be on income support.

[12:45]

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

No, I mean, we have seen it. I mean, you can be ... you can have a private landlord and the tenant can still claim income support. All Income Support will do, they will go up to what they class as a fair rent level. You have to pay the rest. If it does not meet the total amount of your rent, you have to find the rest. You see so it does not ... you cannot go and say: "Well my rent is £300 a week." Well the maximum you will get is £200, that is all. Well, they will take the £200 and they have to find the other £100 to top it up. So the income support ... what used to be the old rent rebate scheme, it will not allow a private tenant to come in and say: "Well, my rent is £300 a week, I expect you to pay that." They will say: "Sorry, this is the rent level for that property. That is all we will pay." That is the way the system is, that is the way the income support system is geared, to pay out for rent reduced or rent rebate.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Do you have any concerns about the money that is collected and the incomes generated by housing and their tenants, that a large portion of that is still going back to the Treasury and not being able to be directed towards the improvements that we all seek to see.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Oh, yes. Yes, we have great concerns about that but it is something that has been in place for many years and the idea of dressing that is by going through this former Housing Association to try and separate that financial link to the Treasury Department as much as possible, and to free up more funds to be made readily available for refurbishment work and future developments. Yes, the old system is in place. It is like ... they are in a locked in situation, an agreement they cannot get out of and the Treasury are quite willing to take their portion and Housing have to make do with £10 million a year, which is not enough. So that is why all this has come about now and that is why it looks as if it is a huge expense for tenants and everyone else but it is going to be over a period of time, it will be for the better. You know, we will look back on this in 10 years' time and say: "What a brilliant move that was to make life so much better for social housing in Jersey."

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

Well, it does not look at first glance that the situation, the financial situation, having the department will not change, because the rent goes up, the income required to be returned to Treasury increases to the same extent and on top of that, there are going to be some additional costs, if you are going to introduce regulations and so forth.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Well, the ... sorry.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

No, no ... really, I just wanted to know your views on those sort of matters.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Well, you see, the beauty of this new association is that the Housing Department will be able to borrow against the strength of the stock of property. We have £1 billion worth of property on the Island and so ... owned by the States and we can use that to get loans to do work and so that would be factored into the rental income coming in. So it is a case of ... because the rent will be going up, so it is a balancing act. It is not as if that we are going to be stuck with £10 million for ever after, that we got this with our Housing Department to increase the amount of funding it can draw in through taking out loans, on the strength of the stock.

**The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

So the trade off or the benefit to the tenants, if you ... let us not call it a trade off, because it is not, but the benefit to the tenants will be, on the one hand they will be required to pay more but their prize is their homes will be much more suitable.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Yes, greatly improved.

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

There are a lot of people in the private sector that do not wish to be there, that they do not fit the criteria to get on to the social side of housing. Do you think that the social side of housing should be widened to encompass these people?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

It has already been suggested that it should be widened. How far the widening goes is down to the Housing Department and I think they are going to work with the Population Office as well to determine what sort of criteria they should widen it to, because ... you have to be mindful of the fact that, because it is social housing, do you say that anyone who comes into the Island should be eligible for housing straight away or is there ... are you saying they should remove the waiting time to become eligible for housing?

**The Deputy of St. Mary:**

Well, no. Basically I am looking at ... there are many incidences of people having bought a home as a couple and splitting up and then not being able to get into any other market but get back into social ... into private rental. Because you get these people into private rental, that drives the price of rental up as well. If you take a certain amount of those people out of it, private rental becomes more competitive, so that would keep the rents lower.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Well, you see, because the Housing Department do have a waiting list that people, even if they do meet the criteria, they are still on waiting list because of the shortage of properties. That is why we are in dire need of new building projects to be identified and started on as soon as possible, but that is not just physical restraints on that, it is also that the planning department are very slow to move. I know there are a

lot of projects out there. That is frustrating the construction industry because the planning department are not moving as quickly as everyone would have hoped.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Thank you. I think my adviser has one final question.

**Ms. A. Davies:**

You spoke earlier about the work you have done with the department on the proposals so far ... the reforms. What role would you want tenants to playing the new association, for example, in its governance structures and decision-making?

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

Well, the tenants would still want to be actively involved as part of tenant participation and we would hope to remain as we are at the moment, because we have got a very good set up, we have got a very good team on the Tenants' Forum Panel made up of various States tenants from different backgrounds, different associations and we want that to remain in place and we know it will remain in place, because they have no plans for, after all this work, that the Housing Department are going to move away: "Sorry, you have done your job, now bye, we are off." So no, the status quo will remain and we hope that we will continue to be actively involved because this is a big step. There is still work to be done. After this goes through there is the transitional process of everyone getting used to it. So in the nitty gritty of the White Paper, the policy parts will come back to us again for fine-tuning. So what you see there is not set in stone, there will be fine-tuning around it and we will be part of that. So it is not as if it is the Minister is going to say: "This is what is happening, end of story." It will be all broken down to policies, which will come back to us again, so you have a lot of impact on States tenants. So we still have a lot of work to do but the important part is getting this proposal through the House.

**Ms. A. Davies:**

Thank you.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

Thank you very much for your time today. I think it has been very helpful and good to meet you. We will close the meeting.

**Chairman, States Tenants' Forum Panel:**

I will give you that back.

**The Deputy of St. Peter:**

I will copy that, thank you very much.

[12:53]