

# STATES OF JERSEY



## MINIMUM RESIDENTIAL SPACE STANDARDS (P.87/2023): COMMENTS

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Presented to the States on 23rd November 2023  
by the Minister for the Environment

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STATES GREFFE

## COMMENTS

### Introduction

The design of the built environment and the buildings where we spend the majority of our time has a significant impact on our mental and physical health and wellbeing. This is particularly true of our homes. Wherever new homes are provided, the creation of good quality residential accommodation is essential, regardless of their tenure, size and type. My recent revision of the planning guidance, setting out minimum standards for the internal and external living space for new dwellings, seeks to ensure that new homes built in the island deliver against this objective.

In revising these standards, however, there was a need to be conscious not only of delivering better homes, but also ensuring that the homes that are created are accessible to the people who need them. Affordability is a barrier to many islanders in being able to access homes; and larger homes are inevitably more expensive.

This is why I have adopted a balanced approach and issued new and revised guidance on density standards; parking standards; and residential space standards to ensure that, taken together as a package of measures, we deliver more and better homes that are accessible and more affordable; and that we are building the right type of homes that islanders need.

### Better homes

There is no question that the revision to the space standards will deliver better new homes for islanders. Despite changes to the island's demography, the way we live, and current expectations, the Jersey standards have not been comprehensively reviewed since 1994. Some minor changes to them were made, relating to a 10% increase to the minimum house sizes in 2009, but no further changes have been made since.

The latest revision to the space standards helps to ensure that new homes in the island are resilient and flexible to meet and match the needs of Jersey residents in the twenty-first century. As part of the revision to these standards, and in light of Deputy Coles' proposition to change them, there are some key issues to highlight.

- **Proportionately designed:** it is self-evident that homes that are designed for smaller households, made of one, two or three people, are going to be smaller than homes that need to accommodate more people who might live in them. It is important to state, however, that a home designed, under these standards, to accommodate fewer people is not something that is inadequate. Just because it is smaller doesn't mean that it offers poor quality.

A 'golden thread' running through all of the revised guidance is that both the minimum internal and external space standards of a home are designed to provide good levels of living, dining and kitchen; storage and amenity space **for the maximum number of people who might occupy that home**. The potential occupancy of the home is determined by the number of bedspaces that might be available (where each standard living space or room over 8 sqm is regarded as having the potential to provide sleeping accommodation). **This ensures that the space available within a home is proportionate to the maximum number of people that it is designed for.**

- **Comparison with other standards:** It is worth noting that the standards adopted in Jersey **exceed** the minimum national standards adopted in the UK<sup>1</sup> and London<sup>2</sup>, for **all one- and two-bed homes**.

Housing design standards issued to support the London Plan also set out ‘best practice’ standards, where additional space might be provided (above the minimum standard) to ensure a higher residential quality. Jersey’s standards for one-bed/ one-person homes match the London best practice standard; and exceed all minimum standards.

To support Deputy Coles’ proposition – to increase space standards for all one- and two-bed homes by 10% - would, **in all cases**, set Jersey’s minimum standards above those regarded as both minimum standards in the UK and ‘best practice’ standards in London.

Bedrooms	Potential occupancy (bedspaces)	Single storey			Two storeys		
		Jersey	UK/ London (min)	London (best practice)	Jersey	UK/ London (min)	London (best practice)
1	1	43/41 <sup>3</sup>	39/37	43/41	-	-	-
	2	52	50	55	59	58	63
2	3	63	61	67	74	70	76
	4	77	70	77	84	79	86

**Figure 1:** Comparison of revised Jersey standards with minimum and best practice standards elsewhere (Gross internal area in sq. m)

- **Flexible and adaptable:** As well as meeting the provision of space, the revised guidance requires that internal living space should be easy to use with layouts that are adaptable to facilitate the flexible use of space, increase living choices and enable home working. The new guidance seeks to ensure the provision of space, within a living room or bedroom, to be adapted to support home working.

This is particularly relevant to the specification for the one-bed/ one-person home. The standards for this type of accommodation have been **increased by between 19 and 25%** (depending on whether a bathroom or shower-room is provided); and where the bedroom space is required to be a minimum of 11.5 sq. m. This is the equivalent size of a secondary double/twin room; and is designed to enable the provision of home working space in a single-person home.

#### **Affordable and appropriate to housing needs**

- **Affordability:** It is clear and well-evidenced that the cost of housing is a barrier to many islanders in accessing their own homes. Data<sup>4</sup> shows that a working household with mean net income was not able to service a mortgage affordably on the purchase price of a median-priced house of any size or a two-bedroom flat in 2021: this situation is only likely to have worsened.

<sup>1</sup> [Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [Housing Design Standards LPG | London City Hall](#) (June 2023)

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between these figures reflects the provision of a bathroom (43 sqm) or a shower room (41 sqm)

<sup>4</sup> [Housing affordability in Jersey \(gov.je\)](#): Jersey housing affordability index 2021

We need to address the issue of housing affordability and ministers are working hard to do this through initiatives such as the Assisted Purchase Pathway<sup>5</sup>. But we also need to be conscious of the effect of other decisions on the price of housing; and it is inevitable that any change to the size of homes will make them more expensive.

Very simply, the delivery of larger homes requires more building material and more labour and, therefore, costs more to build. This inevitably leads to higher sales prices, putting the price of homes beyond the reach of more islanders.

The financial implications of Deputy Coles' proposition are significant; and likely to make homes less affordable to islanders. Whilst space standards are important to the health and wellbeing of occupants, there is no evidence to suggest that the revised standards that I have adopted are at all deficient in this respect; and making homes less affordable and accessible is likely to lead to more significant issues of the health and wellbeing of islanders who cannot access appropriate housing.

- **Need for smaller homes:** We also need to ensure that the homes that we are providing are meeting the island's housing needs. It is very clear that in Jersey, as in many other parts of the developed world, household sizes are falling; and people are living in smaller households. The size of the average Jersey household continues to fall (the average is now at 2.27 people per dwelling<sup>6</sup>); and the largest category of household in the island is the single adult (comprising 19% or 8,603 households); with another 12% (5,463 households) made up of single pensioners, meaning that over 30% of islanders live on their own<sup>7</sup>.

We also see the current largest demand for homes (between 2023-2025), is for smaller homes, including both one- and two-bedroom properties, and especially the latter in the owner-occupier and social rented sectors<sup>8</sup>.

The effect of Deputy Coles' proposition – to remove the one-bed/one-person home; and the two-bed/ three-person home - would be to remove choice in the size of home available to islanders looking to live in a smaller property. As stated above, it would also render the price of one- and two-bed properties that much more expensive, and out of reach of more islanders; and also of those wishing to return to the island.

- **Overcrowding:** The planning system can regulate the size of homes but cannot regulate the number of people who might occupy residential accommodation.

It can seek to ensure that homes are appropriately designed to ensure that they are capable of providing good quality accommodation for the number of people that the home it is designed to accommodate, relative to bedspace and its size.

Deputy Coles' proposition seeks to remove the one-bedroom/one-person; and the two-bedroom/two-person specification of new homes in an attempt to reduce the potential for overcrowding. This approach is considered to be flawed.

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<sup>5</sup> [Assisted purchase home ownership schemes \(gov.je\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> See Figure 1: number of persons per private dwelling 1971-2021 [R\\_CensusBulletin2\\_20220504\\_SJ.pdf \(gov.je\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> See Table 7: Household structure [R\\_CensusBulletin2\\_20220504\\_SJ.pdf \(gov.je\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Future housing needs \(gov.je\)](#)

Overcrowding can, of course, occur in all forms of housing, both existing and new; and in all sizes of home: this is not just an issue for new, smaller flats or houses; and is not an issue that can be addressed by the planning system, or changes to planning guidance. Results from the 2021 Census suggest that, using the ‘Bedroom Standard’<sup>9</sup> measure of over-crowding, 1,783 households could be classed as ‘overcrowded’ in Jersey on census night, having fewer bedrooms than required by the standard (this is not, however, a measure of the amount of space available). This represents 4% of all households. The proportion of households classed as ‘overcrowded’ decreased marginally over the 10-year period, from 4.5% in 2011 to 4.0% in 2021.

A greater proportion of households (26.4%) were ‘under-occupied’ in Jersey on census night 2021. This is, perhaps, reflective, of the need to provide more smaller homes to help people to right-size (and to make better use of the existing housing stock) rather than to restrict the range of smaller homes that might be available in the island.

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of all of the above, it is considered that the revision to the space standards for one- and two-bedroom homes in Jersey, as set out in the revised supplementary planning guidance, provides a considered and balanced approach to delivering improvements in the island’s new housing stock; and that these standards will deliver more and better homes that are more affordable to islanders, and which better respond to their needs.

Support for Deputy Coles’ proposition will unnecessarily inflate the cost of new, smaller homes; will restrict the choice and variety of smaller homes that are needed by and available to islanders; and is otherwise unjustified. I urge Members to reject it.

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<sup>9</sup> The ‘Bedroom Standard’ (UK Housing Overcrowding Bill, 2003) defines the number of bedrooms that would be required by the household, where a separate bedroom is allowed for each married or cohabiting couple, any adults aged 21 or over, pairs of adolescents aged 10-20 of the same sex and pairs of children under 10 years. Unpaired persons of 10-20 years are notionally paired with a child under 10 of the same sex.