

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 2nd NOVEMBER 2010**

Question

Given the increased demand for social housing in times of recession and following the Whitehead Report's criticisms of the rental waiting list, what action, if any, does the Minister propose to take to meet the demand for social rental housing by 2014?

Will these actions be limited by the requirement to cut the Department's budget by approximately £1.4 million by 2013 and by targets for housing property sales of £48 million over the 3 year period 2011 to 2013?

Answer

Professor Whitehead's report was not critical of the rental waiting list. What the Professor highlighted was that the access criteria for social housing or at least for the States owned social housing stock is extremely constrained and focuses on the most disadvantaged 20% of our society. However, she highlighted that were eligibility criteria widened to include in particular, childless couples under 50 who are presently largely excluded, the waiting list would probably be much higher.

In the Policy Statement I issued in August this year I said that we need more affordable housing and to deliver it we would need to consider new policy initiatives; to ensure that zoned land is developed in a timely manner and that existing States owned land, such as the d'Hautrée site, is used to provide affordable housing. I also said that private development capital could be borrowed and repaid from rents. This use of development capital could remove the burden of the capital cost from the tax payer.

I am not in a position where I alone can deliver the new affordable homes which I believe we need. New homes, particularly new affordable homes require land to be zoned for residential purposes. That is the responsibility of the Planning Minister who is provided with updates on the level of our waiting and transfer lists on a monthly basis. I will always work closely with the Planning Minister and give every assistance I can to try and ensure sufficient sites are available to deliver sufficient homes for Island residents.

As the Deputy has suggested in his second question our revenue budget has been cut by £1.4m or 10% by 2013. This will require that certain activity be reprioritised or performed differently in order to achieve the savings required. Cuts in revenue will not adversely affect the development of new affordable housing. However, that activity will be impacted by the necessary reprioritisation of the States Capital Programme. In addition, the current economic climate has seen Bank's limiting their lending and this has made sales to tenants more challenging. Taken together these factors will create a difficult environment in which to develop new affordable homes and refurbish its existing units. These are indeed difficult times. However, I am not one for standing still and my officers have identified opportunities for certain projects, particularly those which deliver new homes, to be funded from borrowing and are already in discussion with the Treasury in respect of the most appropriate way to facilitate this to ensure that the impact of the economic downturn and spending cuts is kept to a minimum.