

24.02.06.

**9.2 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South of the Minister for Housing and Communities regarding improvements to access to social housing. (OQ.14/2024)**

Will the Minister commit to widening access to social housing and reducing the age of eligibility for persons without children from 40 to 25 by implementing the timeline included in the roadmap for improving access to social housing in Jersey published in July 2023?

**Deputy S. Y. Mézec (The Minister for Housing and Communities):**

Yes.

**9.2.1 Deputy D.J. Warr**

Apologies for being unprepared here. Will the Minister bring forward the timetable for reducing the age of entry into the Housing Gateway so that in March the new age limit will be 25, in line with his desire to overcome the housing crisis and, if not, why not?

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

The timeline, as I understood it, it was proposed to bring the age down to 25 by October not March. March is due to be down to 30. I would propose sticking with the original plan.

**Deputy D.J. Warr**

Sorry, Sir, I do not think he answered my question.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Well, he did. He said it is in October and that was the original plan.

**Deputy D.J. Warr**

My question was: was he intending on doing it earlier?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Well, he is not. He is sticking to October.

**9.2.2 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

With that succinct yes, my supplementary ask is how many additional people will be, in the Minister's view, therefore, entitled to the provision of social housing?

**Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Ultimately we will not know that until it happens because we do not know how many people currently do not fit within the eligibility criteria who will actually benefit from that if it is extended to them, or when it is extended to them, I should say. The last time that the criteria were widened as part of this phased approach there were not as many applications as the Gateway was expecting there to be at that point. So I think we should stick to the plan as it currently is but it may be worth having some kind of a think about advertising more widely that the criteria have been expanded. I am sure that there will be lots of people out there who have been living their lives just expecting that they would not ever be eligible for social housing and if that does change we need to make sure that they know about it so that we get the Gateway to being what it ought to be, which is an accurate reflection of what need there is for affordable housing in Jersey and not just who happens to tick the box with the criteria.

### **9.2.3 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Thanking the Minister for his reply, does he have any indication of a range: is it 100, 200? The important supplementary question I want to ask is: what is he going to do to ensure that the supply of those houses is available?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

That last part is an extremely good point because it would be foolish to widen the criteria when the supply has not been delivered because that would overwhelm the Gateway and you would end up achieving little apart from extending waiting lists and having people languish there. We are in a lucky position where with the Cyril le Marquand Court having been delivered, that has had a substantial impact on reducing the demand for one-bedroom homes. That is not just people transferring from the private sector; it is also people downsizing within social housing, which means we free up 2 and 3-bedroom places to allow people into those. Edinburgh House, of course, has also recently had people move in and relatively soon we will be looking at The Limes as well. That is quite a substantial amount of supply being put on in a relatively short period of time, which means that high urgent demand for one-bedroom flats can be managed better than we have been able to do previously, and I think that means it can be justified to expand the criteria without worrying too much about overwhelming the list. I think we saw that last time it was expanded that it just did not happen.

### **9.2.4 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Would the Minister consider removing the need to provide a deposit under the First Step scheme to make sure that the barrier for the first-time buyers might be overtaken?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Sir, that is not this question. I think she has mixed it up with a later question. The First Step scheme is not to do with the roadmap for social housing.

### **Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Apologies. When we expand this scheme for 25 years of age to buy the property, would ... apologies.

### **The Deputy Bailiff:**

It is the question on reducing the age for eligibility for persons without children. We will come back to you if you think of a question, Deputy Gardiner.

### **9.2.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

As chair of J.A.Y.F., Jersey's youth homelessness charity, we often see we have youngsters coming through and being supported by us when they are ready for independent housing but under the age of 25 they are unable to find appropriate housing. Will the Minister explain if he will review the access for social housing for those under the age of 25 and, if not, why not?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Definitely and I am aware of instances of younger people who have been assisted by the very charity that the Deputy has referred to and as they have got older have faced arbitrary difficulties with transitioning to independence. As part of our corporate parenting responsibilities, we accept that we continue to have a role in looking after children who have been through the care system into what is legally considered their adulthood. My parents did not just throw me out when I turned 18. They let me live there for a little bit longer after that as well and we should have the same approach to the children who are in our care.

### **9.2.6 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Understandably, of course, it is very important that we, as corporate parents, take the responsibility of those in our care but unfortunately J.A.Y.F. does see a number of youngsters who are not in the care system who also are vulnerable from homelessness and I believe also need to be supported in finding that independent housing and giving them a safe and affordable place to live. Will the Minister, therefore, commit to developing a specific strategy to combat access to affordable housing for especially vulnerable young adults not just those care leavers under the age of 25?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Definitely and I would be very keen to have that conversation directly with this particular charity and others that are involved in this area. I think that in the last few years we have seen the development of the Housing Advice Service, which I think is branching out into doing more than we anticipated that it would do to support people to find the right kind of housing for them. As we continue to develop that, that could well be a place where we help people on an individual basis through those pathways. That is something I would definitely like to consider and I am happy to have that conversation.

[15:30]

### **9.2.7 Deputy T.A. Coles:**

With the expanding of the eligibility, does the Minister agree that there may be a need to review the banding of priorities within the housing model?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Is the Deputy referring to the bands - there is band 1, 2 and 3 - or is he referring to the criteria that distinguish between them?

### **Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Yes, the criteria that distinguishes between the 2 to ensure that the most vulnerable are taken before age.

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

It was not that long ago that this particular banding was changed and was improved from what existed previously and I think was simplified. I think it is fair to keep a watching eye on that and look at how demand is managed as the criteria are widened and the new supply comes on board, but this particular iteration of the banding system is not that old yet at this point. We must keep a watching eye on that but I would not yet suggest commissioning a full review into it because it has not been in place for that long.

### **Deputy M. Tadier:**

My question was effectively asked by Deputy Jeune, so I do not need to ask it.

### **9.2.8 Deputy D.J. Warr**

When we come to reducing the age of eligibility, when people go into the Gateway band, there is an income level. It is income criterion that is set at the point of entry. Obviously with a younger generation going in, their ability to increase their income will hopefully progress as time goes on. Are there any considerations around looking at rent review whereby instead of paying 80 per cent, maybe those people end up paying 100 per cent?

### **Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

No, charging 100 per cent of rent is not social housing.