

23.03.21

12 Deputy L.V. Feltham of the Minister for Housing and Communities regarding social housing providers (OQ.50/2023)

Further to his answer to Written Question 1/2023, is it the Minister's assessment that the Government should have a formal contractual arrangement with social housing providers; and if not, why not?

Deputy D. Warr (The Minister for Housing and Communities):

I thank the Deputy for her question. We obviously already have a formal contractual arrangement with Andium and the Government. I do want there to be formal arrangements for all social housing providers and last night's meeting at the Parish Hall was a case in point and proves why there is a need for that. The Deputy will hopefully be pleased to know that I have already considered this matter. My officers have already spoken to the housing trusts about some of the issues that will form part of any arrangement. I hope the Deputy is assured that this issue is being addressed.

3.12.1 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Is the Minister aware of the recommendation by an independent review of access to social housing in 2019 that there should be a statutory framework for allocations of social housing, which would also enable performance monitoring and the establishment of an independent regulator. Will he bring forward those recommendations as proposed?

Deputy D. Warr:

I am aware that efforts have been attempted before in this respect. Once again, my view is this is overcomplication of residential tenancy laws and what I am hoping to do is, when we have our White Paper and we have our in-committee debate and we bring the legislation in December to the Assembly, we will be able to encompass a lot of what the Deputy has just mentioned there. It is going to be up for discussion but I think it is going to be much more effective if we can have one overall umbrella set of legislation rather than disparate pieces of legislation, which has been the problem in this area for many decades.

3.12.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Minister referred to formal arrangements that are in place between the Government and Andium Homes. One of those arrangements is that, no matter how high inflation gets, Andium's rent increases are capped at 4 per cent. Does the Minister agree that a version of that arrangement at least should exist with the other social housing providers?

Deputy D. Warr:

As the Deputy is aware, we already have our social housing providers already capped with rents at 80 per cent of the market rate. In terms of the arrangement with regard to the annual increase in rents, that is an open discussion and it will form part of our review within the White Paper.

3.12.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It sounds like the Minister is open-minded on that subject, so would he confirm whether he would be content to have completely different arrangements exist for the government-owned social housing provider compared to the other providers where one would have their rent increases capped and the others would have a free-for-all so long as they remain within the overall cap?

Deputy D. Warr:

That is up for discussion. I would not like to pre-empt the outcome of the White Paper.

3.12.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister tell us when we will see this White Paper? I have heard so much about it, I am riveted.

Deputy D. Warr:

I would like to think the next 2 to 3 weeks. That is my objective. So you can hold me to that one, but it is very imminent.

The Bailiff:

“The Deputy can hold me to that.”

Deputy D. Warr:

Sorry.

3.12.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Very imminent, it is a form of words that I do not trust. Can he say: “I will have it to you by a month’s time”?

Deputy D. Warr:

Yes.

3.12.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Deputy Southern took my question but I do have another one. Given what we did hear from residents last night, is the Minister satisfied that the residents that are paying their rents to social housing providers are indeed getting good value for money and also that the taxpayer is getting good value for money for the subsidy that those providers are also getting in the form of social security payments?

Deputy D. Warr:

Are they getting good value for money? That is very difficult to determine. There is an objective assessment, without going through all the numbers and the costs and talking in depth to the housing associations, I simply do not have an answer to that question. Again these are discussions that are ongoing and obviously Deputy Southern is fully aware now that we will publish a White Paper in which those kind of discussions will be considered.