

23.10.17

12 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Housing and Communities regarding legislation relating to homelessness (OQ.208/2023)

Will the Minister bring forward legislation to define homelessness and will this legislation include a requirement for the Government to provide housing to those who meet that definition and, if not, why not?

Deputy D. Warr of St. Helier South (The Minister for Housing and Communities):

I thank the Deputy for his question. I do plan to bring forward legislation to define homelessness. But, as the Deputy is aware, there is already a formal definition that I published last year, just a quick reminder of what that was: "Rooflessness without a shelter of any kind; houselessness with a place to sleep but temporarily in institutions or shelters; living in insecure housing, threatened with exclusion and living in inadequate housing in caravans or illegal campsites, in unfit housing or in extreme overcrowding." My immediate priorities set out in my Ministerial Plan are strengthening data collection on the scale and nature of homelessness and ensuring that Islanders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are able to access support through the Housing Advice Service, accommodation providers and other agencies. The Government already provides housing to those who report their needs to the Housing Advice Service but I am aware that there are Islanders who are homeless and have not yet asked for help. This includes Islanders who are sofa-surfing or living in inadequate accommodation. I would like to take this opportunity to ask those people to get in touch with the Housing Advice Service. I believe that focusing on these actions lays the groundwork for legislation and will put in a much stronger position to formalise arrangements for homelessness.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Sir, he did not answer the second part of the question that was provided with notice, which was whether, along with the statutory definition of homelessness, it would have a requirement for Government to provide housing for those who meet that definition.

The Bailiff:

It is true he did not answer whether there would be a requirement within the legislation. The Minister said that the Government does already provide housing for those that fit within the definition that he has given. Are you able to say if the new law will provide a requirement for it, Minister?

Deputy D. Warr:

Sir, we are already doing, as you correctly said there. What I would say is we have published a definition of homelessness. We have established a Housing Advice Service. We are delivering new support in housing and we are expanding Gateway criteria. I am trying to understand what we are not doing or what the Deputy in addition ...

The Bailiff:

I think answering the questions that have not been asked in those terms it can lead easily to confusion. All that was being asked is that if there is to be a new definition, is there going to be a requirement for Government to provide housing for those who fall within it? I had taken you to say that that is something Government already does in accordance with the definition that you presently

have, and the only additional point to that seems to me to be whether or not there is to be a requirement in any new legislative provision.

Deputy D. Warr:

We are going to be publishing the new up-to-date Residential Tenancy Law next year, developing that and within there we will certainly be looking at that particular aspect.

4.12.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

He referred to the Residential Tenancy Law, is that where the statutory definition of homelessness will be found?

Deputy D. Warr:

It is certainly my intention to be the case.