

3.6 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Housing regarding repairs to States rental housing:

Will the Minister inform Members what budget is allocated currently and historically to response repairs in the States rental housing, how this sum was arrived at, how much of this sum goes on 'fair wear and tear' costs on re-lets, what role re-charges to tenants plays in funding and what plans, if any, are under consideration in this area in respect of the new housing company?

Deputy A.K.F. Green of St. Helier (The Minister for Housing):

The response repair service provided by the Housing Department is a reactive service. It deals with unplanned maintenance issues which arise on a day-to-day basis and which are normally raised by the tenants. As such, it is difficult to budget for these items accurately as they are demand-led but I can advise the Assembly of the costs in recent years: 2010, £2 million; 2011, £1.7 million; 2012, £1.8 million; 2013, £1.7 million and we estimate that it will be about £1.6 million for 2014. A different budget is allocated for the refurbishment of vacant units when there is a change of tenant. The cost of this service is as follows: 2010, £1.2 million; 2011, £900,000; 2012, £900,000; 2013, £700,000 forecast and 2014 £800,000 budgeted. When a unit is allocated, it will be in a clean and good state of repair for the incoming tenant. Tenants are expected to keep their homes in a reasonable state of decoration and repair throughout their tenancy. When tenants move out they are expected to return the home in the same condition that it was allocated in. Tenants are asked to repair anything which has been damaged or destroyed other than through fair wear and tear. There are no plans under consideration to alter the current tenancy arrangement on voids policy. This was created in partnership with the Tenants' Forum in 2009. This aims to make outgoing tenants accountable for the standard of the property and so liable for re-charge if they fail to repair anything which has been damaged or destroyed through any other reason other than 'fair wear and tear.'

3.6.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

This depends on the definition of 'fair wear and tear' I suppose but, for example, is it possible that someone having lived in a house or a flat for up to 10 years should be charged over £1,000 to put the flat back to its original condition when they have been there for over 10 years?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

It is possible depending on the condition of the unit when they vacate it.

3.6.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister think that charging social housing tenants sums of over £1,000 is appropriate when these social housing tenants have difficulty making ends meet anyway at the best of times?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

If tenants keep their homes in a fair and reasonable condition, they will not get a bill.

3.6.3 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Minister advise what he means by a fair condition?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

That is subjective and I accept that and that is why I believe the condition reports which I intend to sign a Ministerial Order for, to bring into force in January for all landlords to be working to, the condition reports will help with that.

3.6.4 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Does the Minister advise tenants before moving into a property to take photos of the property, so therefore if there are any issues when moving out, that that can be reasonably argued with the department?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

That is precisely the route we will be going down with the condition reports.

3.6.5 Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister confirm that some States rental housing that may have been occupied for a very long time, the definition of 'fair wear and tear' is so difficult and that some of the windows, for example, are in such poor condition that they would qualify for energy conservation assistance from the budget of the Minister for Planning and Environment? Could the Minister confirm that that is the case, that there are works definitely needed to many housing properties which really are overdue?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Yes, and I thought we had discussed this in great detail in P.33/2013 on 16th May this year. That is exactly why we have got a refurbishment programme and we intend to put right things like windows and double-glazing and it is all in the plan.

3.6.6 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

This is not an attack on the Minister but when you visit some States properties that I have in the past and you could put your hand into a crack in the wall and almost waggle it about outside, which certainly was the case in The Cedars, when you have got rot and damp that is rotting people's clothes, to what extent is that taken into consideration when people are then to be asked to keep their properties in a fair condition when, as really Deputy Young said, they probably were not in a fair condition in the first place?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Structural defects are not the responsibility of the tenant. They are the responsibility of the department and I think that the particular building that Deputy Pitman is referring to is under repair at the present time because what he described is what we found, certainly on the top floor of La Collette and other flats in La Collette, but they are structural repairs for which the department takes responsibility.

3.6.7 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I am not suggesting that the Minister would blame individuals for structural faults but what I am saying is the knock-on effects of those problems within properties. To what extent are those taken into consideration where people inherit a property that really is not in fair condition by anyone's imagination?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

It is taken into consideration but, as I say, structural repairs are clearly the responsibility of the department and we do not tend to shirk that responsibility. So if there is a crack between the ceiling and the wall that is our responsibility.

3.6.8 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

Will the Minister advise how the appeal process works?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The appeal process normally goes through my officers and in extreme cases, it sometimes ends up with myself: so normally through the officers and then to myself if need be.

3.6.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Drawing clear distinction between property that is damaged or where that is negligent, how much was generated by re-charges on re-lets last year?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not have that information.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister supply that information, please?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Yes.