



# Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny

## Panel

### Quarterly Public Hearing

### Witness: The Minister for Housing

Wednesday, 24th April 2024

**Panel:**

Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Chair)

Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South (Vice-Chair)

Deputy A Curtis of St. Clement

Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South

Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary

**Witnesses:**

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South, The Minister for Housing

Ms. N. Day, Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration

Mr. J. Norris, Principal Policy Officer, Housing and Regeneration

[10:30]

**Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Chair):**

Today is 24th April 2024 and this is our first public hearing of the new Minister for Housing, so welcome. First of all, I would just like to draw attention to the following. This hearing will be filmed and streamed live and the recording and transcript will be published afterwards on the States Assembly website. All electronic devices, including mobile phones, should be switched to silent, a good example just then. I ask that any members of the public who have joined us in the room today do not interfere with the proceeding and as soon as the hearing is closed please leave quietly. For the purpose of the recording and the transcript, I would be grateful if everyone who speaks could ensure that you state your name and your role. First of all, we will do a round of introductions. I

suggest we, as panel members, go first and then followed by the Minister and your team. My name is Deputy Hilary Jeune and I am the Chair of the Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Committee.

**Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:**

Deputy Tom Coles, Vice-Chair.

**Deputy A. Curtis of St. Clement:**

Deputy Alex Curtis.

**Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South:**

Deputy David Warr.

**Connétable D. Johnson of St. Mary:**

David Johnson, Constable of St. Mary.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Deputy Sam Mézec, Minister for Housing.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Natasha Day, Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration.

**Principal Policy Officer, Housing and Regeneration:**

Jack Norris, Policy Principal, Housing and Regeneration.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. I would first like to thank the Minister for agreeing to move this hearing to an earlier time. I apologise but I have a funeral to attend, so I will have to leave earlier than the end of this hearing and so my Vice-Chair, Deputy Coles, will take over the hearing after an hour. Of course, if any officers who have not introduced themselves and want to invite to speak, then please do so. Of course, we only have 1½ hours and we have a lot of questions. I am going to begin first and, hopefully, we can get to as many as possible but of course we will be following up if need to, Minister. Minister, the Council of Ministers published its Common Strategic Policy on 9th April and is scheduled to be debated in the States Assembly on 21st May. Are you satisfied that the shared vision places enough emphasis on addressing the housing crisis, which you declared in January?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I do, and it makes very specific reference in the section about housing to the Housing Crisis Emergency Taskforce that has been formed. That, as the body, is the kind of driving force in pursuing my agenda for resolving the housing crisis. I am very pleased with how that is going so far and very pleased that that has been included in the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy). This C.S.P. looks a bit different to how previous C.S.P.s have looked. It focuses more on the kind of list of tangible things to achieve rather than focusing on thematics of what the priorities are, which I think was a conscious decision and I think it puts us in a good position to focus on specific achievements that are more tangible. They are still connected to the Future Jersey outcomes, which the previous C.S.P. also linked into. There will be measures of what progress we make. That will be things like: proportion of low-income Islanders living in rental stress; what proportion of an average mortgage could an average household afford? All of that is tracked and we can see that very clearly on the Government website. I think by making it focused on tangibles rather than thematics, that gives us a good starting point for what is going to be a relatively short term of this Government. I am very pleased with how that has been laid out.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Does it provide the backing that you will need to secure funding for your stated priorities over the next 2 years, do you think?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Initially, yes. The Government Plan will be the main place for that and that is going to be the housing crisis and that it does need to be resolved. A lot of the things that we will do as part of that mission do not cost a lot of money. Some of that is policy change, some of that is law change, which once it is done a law existing is not an expensive thing on a day-to-day basis. Some of the bigger things that we may want to come to, we will have to have those political discussions, but I feel at the moment satisfied that the leadership of the Government is of the same mind frame as me and considering the housing crisis as an important part of this Government's agenda.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

You have stated in a briefing with us earlier in the month, your priorities until 2026 are: "Supporting more Islanders into home ownership, improving the situation for tenants and addressing homelessness." Not all of these are in the priorities. The panel will explore each of these areas today, but how will you gauge your success in these areas when you leave office?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I have mentioned some of the measures that are already done by the Government. I want to see the numbers of low-income Islanders living in rental stress reduced. That is something that we can measure and that we do measure and we will be able to see where we are in a couple of years on

that. The gap between income and house prices and what is officially measured as affordability that Statistics Jersey does, that they produce those figures very frequently, we will be able to get a feel for how things are going as we go along. Those, I think, are quite easy things to use to measure whether we have been successful there.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. Moving on to the delivery of new homes, you told the panel in March that it was your intention to communicate with developers of the rezoned sites in the Bridging Island Plan and to clarify what proportion of properties would be first-home buyer homes. Have you started those conversations and what have you learned?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes, we have already had, I think, one that we have given our full feedback to and have been pleased with where we got it, as it is not a secret that, is that?

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

No.

**The Minister for Housing:**

No, okay, that is ...

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

It is a bit like a planning application.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes, you are always careful on those as to what stage they are in. Yes, one of the ones in St. John, for example, we are able to deal with relatively quickly. I expect to get a fair few of those coming our way and I want to be able to respond to those as quickly as possible because the kinds of homes that they are seeking to deliver are desperately needed and the fewer blockages they can experience on our side obviously that makes it easier for them. In terms of the team that helped prepare some of those comments, I know that some training has been taken for some members of the team on planning and how we respond to those, so hopefully that will help us deal with some of that quicker as well.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Just the last bit of that question was about what have you learned. Is there some things so far that you have already seen?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Not really, I think. It is too early, I think, for me to say what I have learned because I have not really had time to notice any patterns on that. I have just got to be alive to any issues as they do arise and try to respond to them quickly and in the spirit upon which those sites have been allocated for affordable housing and to not loosen my resolve on making sure we get the best that we can out of those sites.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. What conversations have you had with the States of Jersey Development Company and Andium Homes about maximising the availability of homes on forthcoming developments for people who do not yet have a home?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Indeed. Obviously I am frequently in conversation with Andium about the various sites they are looking at. There are areas that they are looking to acquire that they want my support for them to do that. We have had some of those conversations and I have given constructive feedback on that to make sure that we are getting the best out of that. The S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) is slightly different and it will not be a secret of some of the points I have made about some of their developments in the past in their proposals. I have deliberately met with their C.E.O. (Chief Executive Officer) a few times recently to explore what options we have for maximising the contribution of affordable housing on the sites that they have been looking at, beyond what they had until this point said that they were willing to provide. I think we have explored some potential ways that we can do that. They are in conversation with our officers about getting some of the detail under that to make sure that we can target those homes when they are built to the people who would most benefit from them and provide those opportunities that they would struggle without those opportunities, rather than what I had been concerned about in the past, which was using Government-owned land to just build a random kind of home that did not match the profile of need that we know there is in Jersey.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Okay, thank you. Do you believe that there is a realistic prospect of proposals for the development of the rezoned sites coming forward during this term of office?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I am an optimist, so my answer to that is certainly yes. I do not underestimate how much of a challenge it is. Honestly, the person who has probably got the biggest challenges or the people who have got the biggest challenges there will be the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Infrastructure because that is part of what is causing some of the difficulties there. When it comes

to an affordable housing provider or private sector or a combination of the 2, finding a site and constructing a vision for what the homes will look like, I think we are relatively clear on this side what we would want from them. That means that our engagement with them is a little bit easier; when the site is ready to be built upon we can help them shape that proposal and we are all coming from the same place, ultimately, that we want as many affordable homes as possible, so that that part of that journey is not too difficult.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Just to ask one question, sorry, through the Chair, the question I thought was more aimed at actual developers coming forward. Are there developers coming forward for the green field sites?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I am not sure on all of those sites but some of them certainly.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

Yes, over the last year or so we have had a number of conversations with different developers and landowners. There is probably a split between the sites that are more clearly on their journey to come forward and other sites that we have heard less about. I think a conversation perhaps between these Ministers to explore those sites coming forward because there is provision in the Island Plan that does suggest if those sites do not come forward within a reasonable timeframe that the Government will look to take action. I definitely look forward to speaking to more developers as the proposals start to emerge.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

That really falls into my next 2 questions, which is about what kind of discussions have you had since the formation of Government with the 2 Ministers, Environment and Infrastructure, about the issues and the blockages to help get to the point where you step in as Minister for Housing to help define affordability with the sewerage network capacity, the planning process and how will you prioritise this as a Government?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes. There is something in the diary in the next week or 2 or something like that, the 3 of us, as Ministers, coming together. We have not had to do that up until this point because the other 2 Ministers, I think they have got some of their focuses, which I support them getting on with. The Minister for the Environment obviously wants to make the planning process as smooth as possible and he has got my complete support in doing that. We have not convened as the 3 of us formally at this point but that is happening very soon.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Is this the Regeneration Steering Group or is this a specific thing?

**The Minister for Housing:**

No, this is just the 3 of us as Ministers who have an interest in this area and our portfolios obviously align on it.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Has the Regeneration Steering Group met yet and has there been work done to initiate delivery of homes?

**The Minister for Housing:**

That group has not met yet, no.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Are there plans to?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I believe so, yes.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. I think if there are no other questions from my panel on this area, we will move on to Deputy Coles on the Residential Tenancy Law proposals.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Thank you. Your statement on the progress of the Residential Tenancy Law confirms your intention to remove a social housing regulation from the proposal. Please can you explain what supports your view that this is not an urgent piece of work?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Social housing regulation would be a jolly good thing. I support it and I would like to see it happen. The focus of the Residential Tenancy Law, in my view, is about tenancy contracts and how they are governed, what goes in them, what cannot go in them, that is common between private and social. You will have a tenancy contract irrespective of which sector that you are living in. The matter of how an organisation is governed, what criteria it has to fulfil, what lines of communication it is required to have between this body or that body, is not a contractual matter, it is a regulatory matter. I see them as separate things. I honestly believe that if I were to propose a new Residential Tenancy Law that included all of the reforms to the contractual matters that I really, really want to achieve, at

the same time as doing social housing regulation, I think I would end up adding a significant amount of time on to it as a piece of work. I would risk the whole thing failing because one aspect of it was not got right, which is a political risk of course.

[10:45]

I think that it is acceptable to do those in phases where we give the areas that I have identified as my immediate priorities our full focus and get those resolved and dealt with. We can write the Residential Tenancy Law in such a way that says there will be further phases to this, so the issues that are not tackled by it in the first instance we can come on to later. I think that, by and large, my relationship with Andium Homes is good enough that we can deal with whatever issues we might come across in the meantime without having to defer to an independent social housing regulator or however it looked, which means it is not urgent right at this very moment., but it would be a good thing. I want to get to it at some point, so it is not forgotten, it is just placed in a different point in the timeline.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Can you provide details of that and what sort of advice that you received before you came to this opinion?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I will be frank, it has always been my opinion. I have never thought that latching social housing regulation on to it as ... I just did not think it matched in the first instance. I have always believed that dealing with security of tenure and rent inflation were immediate priorities to the point of them being an emergency - that is how quickly I want them to be resolved - whereas the issue of social housing regulation is beneficial but not an emergency right here and now. I have always believed that and I gave instructions to that effect, I think on my first day in office, if not first maybe second or third, but very, very early on that was something I indicated immediately.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Are you fully satisfied that enhancements with the R.T.L. (Residential Tenancy Law) will provide sufficient levels of protection for people occupying social housing in all areas of their tenancy?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes. I think having a more modern and fit-for-purpose Residential Tenancy Law is going to benefit all tenants. It will also benefit landlords by having a clearer and more up-to-date framework that they know they have got to abide by. It is a law for all tenants.



**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Having social housing regulation is a secondary piece of legislation, is it your intention to do this during your term of office and do you have a timeline in mind?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Quite honestly, no, I do not have a final timeline in mind and I at this point would not want to say that that would be 100 per cent dealt with in this term of office. At the very least I hope, *inshallah*, everything going well with the Residential Tenancy Law, hopefully, then I will be in a position to then get that timeline sorted for the subsequent phases.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Do you accept that there is a risk of social housing regulation being left out of the law entirely?

**The Minister for Housing:**

It will be left out of it entirely in the first instance, so that is a certainty rather than a risk, but if the journey on the Residential Tenancy Law is bumpier than I hope it will be, then, yes, of course there is a risk of everything after that not getting dealt with. Let us be clear, the Residential Tenancy Law work has already missed many deadlines in the last few years. It has already been a bumpy ride up until this point.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Another area that is missing from the R.T.L. is non-self-contained accommodation. Do you have any timeline for modernising this part of the law?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Again, no, that will be something that when we have come to a more definite position on where we are with the main things I put in my focus, then we look at it as the next phase. That will also depend on how complicated a piece of work it turns out to be.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. Connétable.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Good morning, Minister. Continuing the theme of areas excluded from the new law, a further category is landlord employers. Could you provide the panel, please, with a more detailed outline of their concerns presented to you during the course of your research?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes, indeed. I have spoken to some representatives from business about this who were concerned. They had seen that it was originally to be part of this law. I think the basic concern is that the relationship between a landlord and a tenant is one thing; the relationship between somebody who is your landlord and employer, with someone who is a tenant and employee, adds further complexities to it. If you are a landlord with a tenant who you have a legitimate reason to want to ask to leave your property and you go through your process of doing that, and that may involve giving them several months of notice of your intention to do that, that is a different scenario if you are an employer of somebody who you have to sack for gross negligence, who is also occupying a home that you provide them, a home that you might need for the person who you need to replace them urgently. The relationship is quite different and there is further complexities to it. I do not want to forget the people who live in homes that are provided by their employers, they deserve to have security and deserve to have protection as well, but the format that we provide for them might not look exactly the same as what we provide for people who have a more basic landlord/tenant relationship. I think that that is worth having a look on its own and we can, I think, have a more substantial engagement with businesses who provide accommodation and representatives of workers who have their accommodation provided for them, rather than throwing it into the mix of something else. I think we will end up in a better place as a result of that.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Yes. As you are aware, Scrutiny in one area or another has investigated this before and I do appreciate the complexities. Regarding your intention to revisit this with a more measured approach, have you any plans as to how this approach might be manifested and the timeline?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Again, no, not a timeline yet because we are focusing on what I have outlined that we are focusing on, but if we get that over the line, that is the point at which I will say what capacity now do we have in terms of officers and funding to tackle further phases of it? I will want to engage with business representative groups as well to find their capacity and their concerns and get an idea of how long that kind of thing might take.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Thank you. My last question on the excluded categories and in relation to all 3 of these - social housing, landlord employers and non-self-contained accommodation - are you fully satisfied that as they are excluded there are proposals in place that will give them sufficient levels of protection during the interim?

**The Minister for Housing:**

During the interim nothing will change, it will be the status quo for them.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Are you happy about the status quo then?

**The Minister for Housing:**

No, I am not 100 per cent happy about the status quo but I think by throwing it all in together in one go then everyone will live under the status quo for a longer period of time than otherwise. The self-contained accommodation in scope of the current Residential Tenancy Law encompasses such a vast number of people and that is where I focus on that as a priority for something that will, hopefully, satisfy the very, very large category of people who are housed. Then those smaller categories, we get to them. It is a case of let us get a good amount of progress as quickly as possible, rather than waiting potentially years to then get everything at once, bearing in mind we might not get everything at once because part of the law might end up falling or being controversial or being defeated.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Yes. While I understand the rationale regarding these 3 categories, would you expect to have more pieces in place before your term of office expires?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I hope so, but at the very least the work will have started for plotting that journey.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Okay, thanks for that. Moving on to landlords generally, you state in your updates you had been in constant dialogue with key stakeholders, including landlords and representatives for tenants, since you have taken office and I do not know if that is the case. What had been the general themes of those conversations and how are these being reflected in your proposals?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Sure. I think I met the Chair of the Jersey Landlords Association within something like 3 days of taking office. I have continued to meet them very frequently. I think I have met them maybe 7 times or something like that; that has been in different iterations. Some of that has been an informal coffee with the chair of the J.L.A. (Jersey Landlords Association) and also in front of their committee and in various iterations as well. I am being open with them about my approach and what I am looking at. It is fair to say that I get concerns back at me about landlords who have properties that they want to safeguard. They want to know that if there is a risk to their investment because a tenant is causing damage to it, a tenant is not paying their rent or any of that kind of thing, that they are not going to have a law imposed on them that makes it impossible to safeguard that investment. I understand that and accept that, which is why I want to work with them to say I do not want there to be any

scope in a law for revenge evictions to take place, I do not want any scope for no-fault evictions to take place, but when you have a legitimate reason to regain possession of your property there ought to be a clear route for achieving that, so help me. Help me design what that route looks like and make sure that it does encompass all of the potential scenarios that you might envisage that I will not envisage because I do not rent property out. If they can help me construct those pathways I am absolutely open to including them in the law so that we get that balance between those who need to secure and protect their properties and their investments and those people who are just trying to live a decent life and are not doing anything wrong.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Okay. I know one of the fears of landlords was open-ended tenancies they referred to, has that been ... I will not say shelved but you have taken account of their concerns on that point, have you?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I think the discussion around this has not been particularly great overall because - and some people seem to forget this - we already have open-ended tenancies in Jersey; they are accounted for in the current Residential Tenancy Law. The thing about them is that they are open-ended tenancies where a no-fault eviction can happen pretty much anytime in them. That is the issue that I want to resolve. Open-ended tenancies are common in Jersey, they are accounted for under the current law. Many, many, many tenants across the Island will have that arrangement as it stands. I am not proposing to change that but I am proposing to change the ... I would call them loopholes but they are not really loopholes because they are specifically put in the current law that allows for no-fault and revenge evictions to take place and remove them. Open-ended tenancies will continue to be a feature in our Residential Tenancy Law but there will be stipulations put in about how they are ended.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Okay.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

May I just ask, is it by default? Are you saying the open-ended tenancies will become a default option? It is just standard.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Sort of, so rather than having multiple different categories of tenancy I think there should be one category of tenancy, but recognising that there are lots of instances where an open-ended tenancy is inappropriate, there ought to be an option within that framework for a fixed term from the outset of that tenancy where landlord and tenant can mutually agree or in fact the landlord can insist upon saying that the tenancy at the outset will be this length of time. There are lots of reasons why you

might do that. It might be because you are giving a home to a seasonal worker who knows they are only going to be here for 6 months. It might be just because you fancy having a kind of probation period for your tenant before you embark on a more long-term arrangement with them. At the end of that fixed term both sides have the absolute right to say we are not continuing any more, without any reason, without having to go through a complicated process for it, but if it transpires that that arrangement is to be a long-term arrangement of providing a more permanent home for someone, then that would mould into a tenancy that would not have an end date and the other provisions would then come in for how that tenancy would be ended when it did reach the point where it needed to end.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

I think I should deviate from our script, as it were. Is that not the normal case at the moment where most landlords enter into a fixed term and maybe continue on 3 months or so just thereafter? Is that not a fair bit of notice?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I think that there are probably lots of tenants and landlords in Jersey who accidentally end up on open-ended tenancies because they start the tenancy with a fixed term and over time they just do not sign a renewal and it just kind of carries on, the tenant carries on paying rent, the landlord keeps accepting the rent. It accidentally becomes open-ended. The problem then is that when it accidentally or otherwise becomes open-ended, Article 6 of the Residential Tenancy Law applies, which says the tenancy can end at 3 months' notice for any reason with no route of appeal. If a tenant starts experiencing problems, they are worried about the safety of the electricity in their home or they are slightly worried that they can smell gas or mould is growing up that they had not experienced before, they may end up worried that if they complain about it they can just be kicked out for being a nuisance, even though it is their right to live in a home that is safe to live in. It is not that different to what we already have but I am getting rid of the ability to end the tenancy for unjustifiable reasons.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Okay. I think Deputy Curtis wanted to ...

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

I just wanted to pick up on that. Where do you see then the concerns you had with regard to the hardship a tenant might experience in a property are also related to what the Minister for the Environment is planning with the Rented Dwellings Licensing Scheme?

[11:00]

Where do you see the interplay and maybe the mitigation of factors or how do you see the 2 operating together, alleviating or working together?

**The Minister for Housing:**

With the Rented Dwellings Licensing Scheme that comes into force on 1st May, let us be absolutely clear, there are no new minimum health and safety standards coming into force at all. It is the same standards that have already been in place for the last 5 years, which theoretically every home should already abide by and every landlord should be meeting those standards. If the intention of that law has been successful, then there ought to be no change from now. The only change is that over time there will be an inspection regime introduced just to ensure it. The reason why ending Article 6 notices under the current Residential Tenancy Law are important because right now if you lived in a home that you knew was in breach of the minimum health and safety standards that have been in force for the last 5 years and you thought that by complaining about them you might come across as too much of a nuisance and your landlord might want to get rid of you and replace you with somebody more compliant, you are more likely to keep your mouth shut and not complain about those issues that you are facing and put up with them and , potentially, whether naively or not, end up putting yourself in harm's way because of them. If you change what is currently Article 6 in the Residential Tenancy Law so that you have to provide a reason for ending a tenancy and issuing notice and one of those reasons will not be you have complained too much about me breaking this law, you are more likely to stand up for yourself and say: "You are not fulfilling your contractual and legal obligations to me by providing a safe home, you need to deal with that" and you are not going to get notice issued to you in response to that. It empowers the tenant to stand up for themselves and that is crucial to what I am trying to achieve.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Sorry, I sense that this security will feature well in the search or a review we will do later on. Moving on to rent stabilisation, which is the other aspect of concern for landlords, what specific engagement has been taken or have you had with landlords about that?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes. When I have had my conversations with representatives this is obviously an area of contention. Let us be clear that there is politics in here. Some people are staunch free marketeers and some people prefer controlled economies; most people are somewhere in the middle of those 2 positions. Of course popular politics does come into it. There had been various suggestions of types of controls of rent recently, controlling how often rent can be increased. A suggestion has been made about limiting it officially to once a year. I hear no opposition to that. Pretty much everyone I speak to, including on the landlords' side, says, yes, once a year is about enough, so that is great. Providing

notice for how long a landlord needs to give to inform their tenant that the rent is going up, there are currently no provisions on that. We hear of people faced with last-minute rent increases that totally throw their plans out of the water. I have had anecdotal evidence of constituents who have rent increases proposed to them at a bad point in their cycle of being paid and paying their bills to the point where they did not think they would be able to afford it because it was such short notice they could not plan. Again, when I have spoken to stakeholders, nobody thinks it is controversial that there ought to be some notice period for implementing rent increases. I think there is a bit of discussion over whether that ought to be 3 months or 2 months' notice. We can find our way through that and decide what ultimately is best. I am of the view that there ought to be a limit on how much rents can go up in a single rent review and that we should stipulate what the index for that limit is. This is something that is commonplace in lots of jurisdictions. In the standard Jersey tenancy we already have a form of rent stabilisation which says that rents cannot go up by more than R.P.I. (Retail Price Index) in one go. The standard tenancy contract is not compulsory based, so of course lots of tenancies do not fit that and they can find themselves with inflationary rent increases. There is nothing lawfully to stop that. I would want to propose that some index is applied for how much rent goes up. We have currently asked the Economics Unit to look at what different indexes might look like, what impact it might have. I will then have to make a judgment call based on what evidence they give me, what model I would have the most confidence in believing will have a positive impact and mitigate some of the unintended consequences that some people suggest come about when you apply these kind of indexes. That is going to be controversial, I have got no doubt about that. It will be, but I will make the case for it and try to win people over for it. The one thing I have said though is that if I am going to impose some kind of index-linked cap on how much rents can be increased in one go, there does have to be some consideration about those circumstances where something happens to a property or a tenancy relationship where that cap is inappropriate. I do not want to put landlords off from investing in their properties, doing up a kitchen or providing a nicer living space to live in and then think: "I will not be able to get what the property is worth at the end of it." I have said that there ought to be some route for deviating from the rent stabilisation measures that are provided for as the basic level, but it ought to require some kind of process so you cannot just write a letter to your tenant and say: "I am raising your rent by 20 per cent and that is that" or "I am going to raise it 10 per cent twice every 6 months" or something like that. There ought to be some process to go by to show that it is a justifiable and realistic realignment of rents and can be managed sensibly, rather than imposed. That would be very difficult for a tenant for no good reason.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Okay. It is losing more time than I intended on this one but going on, there were consultation exercises carried out by the previous administration and findings have not been released. Are those findings going to be released?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes, if they have not already been put on the website that will happen imminently. I do not know ...

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

They are published.

**The Minister for Housing:**

They are published.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Sorry, I ...

**The Minister for Housing:**

It has only just happened, so fair enough, yes.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Moving on then quickly, is there going to be any further consultation exercise?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Not like there was last year. My view is that in putting a law together that is fit for purpose and does the business, I think it is better for me to engage in direct-focused stakeholder engagement, sitting round a table, often myself personally to be involved in that but also at officer level as well, to say: "When I am trying to achieve this, what can you contribute to tell me how I make that work better or how I shape that process more in line with what matches your day-to-day experience and needs from what you do?" Rather than a big public-facing survey or that kind of thing, I want it to be a more focused and direct stakeholder engagement to get the best and most constructive suggestions from them to shape the detail. Let us be clear that that is what it is about, it is about shaping the detail. It is not a glorified opinion poll on the principle of what I am suggesting. I am the elected politician with a democratic mandate so I will set what the principle is but the detail, that is what any focused consultation would be based on.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

My final question, Minister, is I just want to know when are you proposing to lodge the relevant proposition?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Hoping to get that for September and I am happy to commit to making sure Scrutiny is updated at every point along the way.



**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Yes, I am sure we will see you again during that time.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Indeed, I look forward to it.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Thank you.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. Moving on to the First Step scheme, Deputy Curtis.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Thank you. Minister, the First Step scheme of course launched for applications in February. Would you be able to update us as a panel on the uptake on the scheme since that launch?

**The Minister for Housing:**

We received 124 applications, which I am absolutely delighted with, bearing in mind that we had been advertising the first tranche of it, so there may well be people out there who were just not quite ready to put an application in but who are aware that tranche 2 and tranche 3 will come later in this year, so might be saving themselves until then. Yes, 124 applications received. Andium have been going through those trying to work out, firstly, whether everybody who has applied was eligible for it, what kinds of applications people were putting in. Jack will have some of the detail on the numbers of where they have got to on that. We are hoping in the next week or 2 weeks possibly to start informing people that they have been successful and have got through it. Imminently, people will be getting some good news.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Would it be possible to share a bit more information about the numbers, about any early learnings you are having either about the eligibility people have had or also the applicability of the deposit levels that people have applied for? If you could share any information on that.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes. Is there anything we can say at this point on the numbers or when is the right time? When are you allowed to do this? If we cannot, then we can do that privately. I think at this very moment I have not been able to do any learning on some of the exact criteria, deposit requirements, et cetera,

but we have time to do that and in further tranches we will be in a position to tweak, if necessary, based on what we can get from looking at these so far.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Assuming it is a little early days, at a high level is Andium, as an operator, sharing feedback that has been reaffirming positions you have expected or challenging assumptions you have had at a high level?

**The Minister for Housing:**

No, not really I do not think. I think they did an extremely good job at considering all of the different potential scenarios. There was really good engagement with estate agents, with lawyers, with lenders and their feedback has been very helpful. There appears to be optimism across the board on all of this. As it stands, I cannot pick out anything that I think ought to have been done any better or any differently; at the moment it is pretty good.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Okay, so feedback from applicants or from the lending mortgage side, are you seeing within applications feedback as to whether expectations were aligned, whether the process for an applicant working with the approved lenders is suitable?

**The Minister for Housing:**

No, it has been pretty good so far. The only thing I might say is that I have had a very small number of people in contact with me directly who did not quite get the message that this affordable housing scheme has an extra criterion on top of it compared to the other schemes, which is that this is exclusively for people buying their very first home. It is not for people who own a small flat who are looking to upsize. There are some affordable housing schemes that exist where that is allowed but we were very clear with First Step that that is not the case for this one. Even if you were eligible for a first-time buyer scheme elsewhere, even though you were a second-time buyer technically, that would not translate to this one. I did get a handful of people contacting me to say they were disappointed by that but we were clear about it from the start. It is misaligned with other schemes, so that might have been what caused confusion there.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Okay. I am presuming that may have had an effect on the type of applicant, what they are looking for, the scheme applies to all types of housing from a size perspective. When do you think you will be ready to share with the panel more data about the types of applications and the quantity and obviously the form that they have come in regarding deposit and unit size?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Very soon because we are about to start telling people that they have been successful. I think we would probably want to tell them first that they have been successful but I think very soon after that we can start saying exactly what kinds of homes they were looking at buying and what their aspirations were.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Okay. Lastly, looking forward, of course you have decided to lodge this in tranches. When are we expecting to see the next tranche come forward and are you comfortable with the level of evidence you have to launch it with the criteria you would like?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Jack might be able to remind me exactly when the second tranche launches.

**Principal Policy Officer, Housing and Regeneration:**

The second tranche will be in July and then the third in September, so that will give us time to review our learning from the first tranche and sort of flag that in any changes to policy and so on.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Okay, thank you.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. Moving on to the Housing Advice Service and Deputy Warr.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Okay, you have expressed the need for increased promotion of the Affordable Housing Gateway and its eligibility criteria and for the Housing Advice Service to be the front door of all housing enquiries. Have you initiated any information campaigns with officers to improve awareness?

**The Minister for Housing:**

We have not got to the public point of that but we have behind the scenes been working on an awareness campaign of that service. I am very keen to promote it because it is brilliant and they are doing a really, really good job. They are going above and beyond where even I had hoped they would when I signed off their creation as one of the final acts of my last tenure as Minister for Housing.

[11:15]

I think we are waiting for the right moment on that because we do not want to launch an awareness scheme for the service in the midst of something else very busy that they are doing because we do want to ensure that they are responding to people as quickly as possible. We are just kind of waiting for the right time but we are behind the scenes working on a public awareness campaign of their existence and their service.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Thank you. In your view, does the Housing Advice Service currently have adequate resources to deal with the increase in enquiries or an expansion of its service? Yes.

**The Minister for Housing:**

I think it is building the Housing Advice Service. I think they are getting more resource this year, I think that is right. They are getting some, so that will improve the situation, but for what they have got and what they are doing they are doing an amazing job and dealing with things, I think, very well. I am very satisfied at the level it is now. The more funding we get the more we can do, so in the future if that happens, great.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Okay. What data is available on the level of enquiries that are now coming through the Housing Advice Service to support any case to expand the service?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Sorry, in terms of ...

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

What data is available? How do you know what demand, what is the level of demand looking like in terms of knowing that you are not sufficiently resourced to deal with that demand? How are we measuring that?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes. I get updates every week at the Housing Crisis Emergency Taskforce about the number of enquiries that they are getting, what they are responding to, how quickly they are responding to them. I think a few months ago they had quite a bit coming their way that they were muddling their way through, not as quickly as we might have otherwise liked. That might have just been a Christmas thing, dealing with the consequences of that. They are in a pretty good place at the moment but I get updates on that all the time, so I am keeping a watching eye on that. That will feed into when we might make certain policy decisions or changes, making sure if that is out of time but they are ready to take it all on.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Okay. Anything you can share with us or be able to share with us going forward on those numbers?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I can tell you that. I have got some stuff in front of me. I do not know what you are after that might be useful but they ...

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Just the ideas of levels, levels of demand on the surface.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes. They have got 34 ongoing cases at the moment. They had 22 new applications, people under 35 who were under assessment for getting on the Gateway. If there is specific things you want we can provide all that because they do collate it.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Okay, great, thank you. The termination of an individual's first-time buyer status will now be within the remit of Government officers. What oversight will the Minister retain and what right of appeal against those decisions will be available to those people? This is not referring to the first-time buyer scheme, this is about people who have ...

**The Minister for Housing:**

Status.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Status, exactly.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes, indeed.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

You made an announcement that you were leaving it with officers now to deal with that.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Indeed. I experienced when I took office the first-time buyer reinstatement applications that were coming to me, the majority of them were very straightforward and that it was an inevitability that they were going to get approved. I was being chased to go through all of that and formally sign that off,

even though the obvious outcome was going to be a yes, the officer recommendation was going to be a yes and all that was doing was taking up time, especially when there are some people who were applying because they had spotted an opportunity that was time-dependent on them going for. I decided that the Housing Advice Service was competent to do that for simple cases without referring to me. I trust them to do it and that is fine. Where there are cases that do not sit comfortably in policy, where there might be some complication or some extra factor that is not accounted for in the rest of the policy, it will come to me to issue a view on that. It could set precedent if they did not come to me for that, so that is still the case. I do still from time to time get people who were not happy with that decision who then come directly to me and I can take a second look at it if they ask me to do that. I cannot think of a single time that I have overturned what the Housing Advice Service have done, because they have made the right decision first time.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Have you outlined that appeals process or do you have a timeline for publishing any changes so that it is clear and communicative to those who are applying that there has been a change but there is going to be a right of appeal?

**The Minister for Housing:**

It is kind of not really framed that way. It is ministerial discretion that allows me to reinstate first-time buyer status.

**Head of Strategic Housing and Regeneration:**

I will clarify, there was a small change made to the policy that was published at the time. It went out with the press notice, so that policy provides the guidance on how the Minister and the service would consider different reasons for having a first-home buyer status reinstated.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Thank you. Thank you, Minister. We are going to move on to homelessness now and Deputy Coles will put the questions.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

How satisfied are you with the rate of progress on the work to implement the homelessness strategy?

**The Minister for Housing:**

As long as there is a single preventable homeless case in Jersey, I will not be satisfied. We are a wealthy Island and we are capable, if we put our minds to it, of putting a package of services together that helps people when they are facing homelessness or ideally preventing them from getting to that situation in the first place. I do think we are making progress. There is the homelessness cluster of

the various homelessness charities and Government officers that are working closely together. There is a piece of work that Jack's team have been doing on examining the data on who is homeless, why they are homeless, that can help inform how we build our services together. The Housing Advice Service is working on a piece of engagement with private sector landlords about supporting them to provide homes to people who are facing difficulties that might lead to them becoming homeless. We are getting there and I am really pleased with that. When we are a little bit further along the line on that I think we can then start looking to have some kind of formalisation of how we provide these services and establish this kind of thing in law so that it is protected for ever more after that.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Can you outline any progress that has been made in relation to your intention to define homelessness?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I think I have been very clear about what my intentions are on defining homelessness, in that there is a definition that is provided for by Government, which is a good definition. I am happy with it. I am not itching to make any changes to it. One day I want to get it in law because it is a good definition and it can be enshrined in that way, but if I immediately start the work to put it in law, it does not achieve anything. To pass a law that says this is what homelessness means does not help a single person not be homeless any more, it just puts words into law that do not lead to anything. As an exercise in the short term, because it does not help people directly right away and would probably divert officer resources well away from stuff that would be making a more direct impact on those people, my view is that we ought to better align our services in the meantime. When that is shaped in a better way to be able to provide in law not just a definition but also obligations on government departments for how they need to respond when they encounter people who meet the homelessness definition, it will be more meaningful when we do it that way round. Tangible work first, legal definition second, not the other way round.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

How integral to your overall work programme is the need to address homelessness?

**The Minister for Housing:**

It is one of my 3 pillars. It is something that we are bringing up at every meeting of the Housing Crisis Emergency Taskforce. It is something that we are monitoring very closely and I am constantly getting updates of the various workstreams that are going on to try to address that.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Any more questions on that?

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Yes, I have a question just to follow on from that. Of course homelessness is a very complicated, multifaceted area. How are you working with other Ministers to try to make sure that we do not have homelessness, as you have stated at the beginning, in Jersey because we are a wealthy Island, making it a Council of Ministers-wide, Government-wide priority?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes. Some of the other Ministers that are, I think, more obviously related to this I think have been invited to the next homelessness cluster meeting that is at some point in May. Their inclusion into that I am hoping will be a good opportunity to get their commitments on some of the bits in their portfolios that might need addressing that have an impact on the work that we are doing. Health is an obvious one that has a big impact on people being at risk of homelessness. Income support as well, my views on the income support system are no secret, that there are some bureaucratic problems that if we just got to grips with we would stop people getting into hardship from the outset. I know the Minister for Social Security is extremely open minded about looking at some of those. They are being brought into the conversation at that next homelessness cluster meeting.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Great, thank you very much. We are racing through the questions, which is fantastic. We are moving on to code of practice and Deputy Coles has the question.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

The panel would like to ask briefly about your involvement with the codes of practice on the licensing of rented dwellings, which went live on 15th April. While this work falls primarily under the remit of the Minister for the Environment, could you outline the level of input that you had in developing the code of practice and any engagement that took place with stakeholders before the document was finalised?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Let us be open about this because I am sure you have had feedback from the Landlords Association that it was not as good as it ought to have been, that their involvement in conversation early on - and then this is not just in recent months but over years, frankly - has not been as direct as I think it possibly could have been. I have not co-written the document myself. I have not been dictating to the Minister for the Environment and his team how it needs to be framed and what ought to go into it. I have met with the Landlords Association and members from it at various times in the last few months where we have discussed this, things have come up and I have provided some feedback



where it has been appropriate for me to do it. I was at a meeting with the Landlords Association and the Minister for the Environment either last week or the week before - I think it was last week - to go over some of their concerns and work on trying to reset some of that and bring them into the conversation in a more inclusive way in the future.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Thank you.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Do you believe, having seen the code of practice, that it will support the mission you have as Minister for Housing to obviously have better housing for tenants? Do you think it will enable property owners and landlords to perform their duty or do you see improvements that you would like to reflect back to the Minister for the Environment, any specific areas where you saw the code of practice could be more focused to enable your vision as a Minister for Housing?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Honestly, the more I have thought about it the more in my head I have struggled to imagine what a perfect code of practice would look like that gets the balance between having the in-depth detail that is vital for ensuring a landlord knows what to do when they worry there might be a hazard present in one of the homes that they rent out versus something that is concise enough to be able to get to grips with it very easily. I am satisfied that the application process for the licence is really simple. I have been through it myself on a computer, been shown through it by officers. It really is simple and very few people are going to struggle with that. I think that there is a little bit more to do on the accessibility of it for people who do not use computers and we got some feedback on that last night at the St. Clement meeting, which you were at. That has been heard loudly and clearly and I will be making points reflecting those to officers as well. There is a little bit of tweaking that could be done to improve that part of the user side bit. The code of practice itself as a document is going to change, it is going to be a living and breathing document. The Minister for the Environment has confirmed that himself to the Landlords Association. Some feedback I have had is that it maybe could do with some pictures being put in it when it is describing stuff like mould, which different kinds of mould look different. It will get better.

**Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

I just want to pause a second, I have got to head off unfortunately and so I will leave you in the capable hands of my Vice-Chair. I apologise again, Minister, but thank you very much for accommodating this. Thank you.

**The Minister for Housing:**

That is okay, sure, thank you.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

We are moving on to the section around empty homes now, which Deputy Warr has some questions for you.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Obviously the latest report, the *Jersey Fiscal Policy Panel Housing Market Review*, states here that: “There is room for improvement in Jersey’s rate of home vacancy. The panel notes that the Government, through the launch of the Empty Homes Service, is working to identify long-term vacant properties and bring them back into use. Bringing vacant properties back into use is welcome in a supply-constrained area.” Do you anticipate any further action on vacant properties in 2024?

[11:30]

**The Minister for Housing:**

The short answer to that is I do not know. When I have had empty homes brought to my attention, I have had discussions with officers about what we can do as a Government to get those homes back into use and the answer is, frankly, very little. We do not have a good framework for being able to do that and it will take some time before we possibly could put forward a framework that enabled the Government to have the powers they need to see a home that is empty for no good reason and say we are getting that back into action.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

That is not quite clear as to whether you are carrying on or you are stopping. Are you stopping the work that is currently in progress? There is obviously a website for people to register empty homes; a lot of work was done obviously under my tenure. Has that work now just come to a halt?

**The Minister for Housing:**

It has because it is not producing any results.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

I was just going to say, so we have had no further reports of empty properties anywhere or has that just sort of petered down to a central conclusion?

**The Minister for Housing:**

We are not accepting any more reports at this point because I think the management of data that was being collated through that is not leading to anything. It is not leading to plans being put in

place to get an empty home back into use. It is maintaining data for not anything to happen as a result of that, which I do not think is a good use of public time and money. I think we have learnt enough about the general causes of homes becoming empty and what could be a mechanism to get them back into use, that that is where focus is better spent directed rather than on data management which is not producing results.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Do you feel that that work sits within your portfolio or does it go to the Council of Ministers on a wider ...

**The Minister for Housing:**

It is different, depending on the reason of a home being empty. I have had a conversation with the Chair of the Comité des Connétables to look at whether anything could be done within the rates system to provide incentives for getting empty homes back into use. That is still a very early conversation with him but obviously it would not be me that would propose that. That would come through the Comité if they thought that they could arrive at something that helped to provide a good incentive there. There are other mechanisms that could be looked at: empty property management orders is something that has been spoken of in the past. I am keen to give a look at that and that, I think, would force me to do that, but it all depends on why a home is empty in the first place. If it is empty because somebody is being lazy or speculative, that is totally different to if a home has been inherited by someone on the other side of the planet who does not even know they own it. It depends why a home is empty and that is why it has been so difficult.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Yes, just leading on from that and broadening it slightly might be outside your department. There are properties vacant because the family are scattered throughout the world and perhaps do not know about it and are not listed and so that would point towards toughening out compulsory powers, et cetera, will not be necessarily in your department. Are you sympathetic to that situation?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Very much so, yes, very much. It is a frustration that there are homes that are empty for no good reason with no solution immediately. Obvious to that and if Government have powers, whoever that sat with, whether it was me or another Minister, to look at an empty home and say: "Right, we are doing something with that", that would be better than where we are now.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

Straying from my brief completely here, do you envisage there being on the carrot and stick, a taxation stick being used to encourage people to comply?

**The Minister for Housing:**

Just speaking frankly, when it comes to this issue I think a stick is better than a carrot. I do not like the idea of a lot of public money and resource going into protecting assets that people have not looked after themselves. I do not think that is a good use of public money. I think a stick approach is more appropriate in these kinds of instances.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

I do not wish to put words in your mouth. Could a stick be translated into an amount equivalent to notional rental income on a property or something of that kind?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I do not think I had specifically considered that as an option, so I would probably want to give a little bit more thought on it before saying something more specific on it.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

I have gone off-piste, I withdraw. Thank you.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Staying on the stick analogy, you mentioned where your consideration has been so far and it has not been to what the Connétable suggested. Could you suggest what considerations are being given to the stick measures as such and whether you have tasked any of your officers to work on early proposals or considerations?

**The Minister for Housing:**

At this point I have not formally given instruction on a specific way forward. I had been a bit open minded until this point, which is why I had a conversation with the Chair of the Comité to understand a bit more from their side as well. My initial thinking thus far is I would be more inclined to a kind of thing like an empty property management order type system. There are iterations of that that exist in other jurisdictions. That is the kind of thing I would be more minded towards but I have not issued formal instructions on that.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Moving on then, yes, I will just take the other questions. We are going to move on to the area of right-sizing, which Deputy Curtis will ...

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Thank you. Would you be able to update, Minister, the panel on progress made in developing a scheme to encourage and incentivise right-sizing?

**The Minister for Housing:**

We are required by an amendment that Deputy Coles brought to the Government Plan to have a policy presented to the States Assembly by the end of next month, which we will do. I will try to be a little bit vague and not spoil the surprise when it comes to it. There are lots of different areas of right-sizing that we have had to look at to work out what is possible and what would be effective, lots of different mechanisms that could help people choose to go into homes that match their needs. There are things that we can do in social housing because we know that there are, shall we say, complexities in the rent policy where some tenants may find it really is not worth their while to downsize, even though that would be appropriate for them and free up a home in the social housing stock. The solution there is a rent-space policy to help incentivise that. We get a lot of feedback from older people that if they were to downsize they would quite like to stay in their community and live somewhere nice where they are currently based, rather than to move into a potential one-bedroom flat in town, which is not the part of the Island that they have lived in for previous decades. Looking at what can be done with the rezoned sites in the Island Plan is something that we could potentially do. There will be more to come at the end of the month, which we are happy to brief you on when we get to that point but we have looked at a few things and are working on it.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

You are happy to confirm that the Assembly will be receiving a policy, as specified in the Government Plan, a debate on the Amendment No. 5.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Absolutely.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Okay. In doing so I assume that some prioritisations had to take place and so respecting you want to keep, Minister, some information back and Scrutiny would obviously like as much information to support you, could you identify what maybe has had to be parked or how you have approached the timeframe in delivering a right-sizing policy, given obviously the restricted timeframes you had?

**The Minister for Housing:**

If there was any reprioritisation to accommodate this, I have not noticed it.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Okay.

**The Minister for Housing:**

Yes, it has gone alongside and we have had some officers who have done some really good and informed work on it so far but I have not noticed it leading to any changes in anything else I am trying to deliver.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Have any other Ministers been involved in the design of the policy and, if so, how has their involvement been reflected in the current proposals?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I have had a conversation with the Minister for Treasury and Resources because there are potential taxation incentives that could be considered as well. We have had that conversation with her but we have not settled on a definitive policy yet, so there is still time on that.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Okay.

**The Connétable of St. Mary:**

First comment if I may, can I just say I do relate to the comment you made about people certainly might be prepared to downsize provided they could find a property in the same area and that is certainly in my own parish there are not too many. That is a bar towards people moving out. Looking wider, does your thinking extend to financial help? If not financial help, massaging of the duties, penalties, some duty they might pay if they do downsize within a certain period of time, that has been ...

**The Minister for Housing:**

All of that is being considered, yes, but, as I said, we have not arrived at a definite conclusion on all of that but, yes, it has been considered.

**Deputy A. Curtis:**

Lastly, on your point you have mentioned the Minister for Treasury and Resources as one stakeholder. Have you performed any analysis at the moment as to whether the housing stock for those who would like to downsize is appropriate? If there is a gap, are you looking to work with the Minister for the Environment on any planning guidance or guidance regarding any new housing stock to be appropriate?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I guess the answer to that is we would if that is the policy that we do in fact arrive on. Yes, that would be necessary if that is where we get to with it.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

We have got one final question on our scheduled plan, which is David Warr.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Have you developed a view on the impact that the return paid by Andium Homes Limited to the States of Jersey has on their ability to improve and expand their services now and in the future?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I have not developed a new view on this because my view is unchanged from where it has been for years now, which is that the more money we ask Andium Homes to return to the Treasury the less they can do. That is obviously true. I have always publicly made the point that Andium receives about £20 million via income support for its tenants in rent and it pays back to Government about £30 million in the financial return. I call that a £10 million subsidy to public services. Social housing is meant to be subsidised but in our system it is subsidising everything else. That is my political view and it has remained unchanged and I can assure you I bring this up when it ever is brought up in conversation in Government, but that is my view on it.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Can I just finish with one other? I have just pulled up the Empty Homes Service and I can see that is still alive on the website. Is that going to be shut down?

**The Minister for Housing:**

It will be, yes.

**Deputy D.J. Warr:**

Okay, thank you.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

That brings us to the end of our scheduled question plan. As we still have some time on the clock, I would just like to ask the Minister, were you prepped and briefed on any questions that we have not asked that you would like to share any details with?

**The Minister for Housing:**

The obvious answer to that is no. No, I had not anticipated questions on homelessness. That was not on my list before but I was happy to answer whatever you had on that anyway.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

Okay. Do you have anything else that you would like to share with the panel at this point?

**The Minister for Housing:**

I have no confessions at this point, Vice-Chair.

**Deputy T.A. Coles:**

No confessions, noted, thank you. Thank you very much, Minister. Is everybody content? Yes. Thank you for attending our hearing today and for addressing the panel's questions. There were a couple of points committed into follow up during the hearing, I do not think they were ... thank you as well to the supporting officers who have contributed today. Thank you very much. We are bringing this meeting to a close.

[11:42]