

2020.02.04

14 Deputy I. Gardiner of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the transfer of administration of all assisted home ownership schemes to Andium Homes: (OQ.29/2020)

Following the Minister's answer to my Written Question 17/2020 in which he indicated his intention to transfer the administration of all assisted home ownership schemes to Andium Homes, will he state what checks and balances will be in place following the transfer to ensure sufficient oversight by the Government and the appropriate decisions are made to meet Jersey's housing needs?

[11:00]

Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):

The Deputy will be aware that we had a review recently of the system that provides for access to social housing and it proposed that the administration of access to assisted home ownership schemes should be separated from that of the access to social rental homes. We are suggesting that it is Andium Homes that takes over the administration of that and that is being done to improve the service provided to clients when they purchase a property because Andium, through its Homebuy scheme, we know has the knowledge and expertise in this area. I think that that will enable the Housing Gateway to focus specifically on social rental applications, not mix the 2, because the assessment of needs that exist there are very different. The transfer has not yet taken place, but it will not happen unless there is a robust agreement which sets out Andium's responsibility to deliver Government-assisted ownership policy and that we have robust arrangements for things like data-sharing, performance monitoring and making sure that there is reporting on K.P.I.s (key performance indicators).

4.14.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister advise what are the checks and balances he is planning to introduce to be sure that the Government will not lose control over decisions that will be made by Andium?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

To be honest, I do not envisage that they will be that different to what exists right now, given that Andium is the main provider of assisted home ownership schemes - their Homebuy scheme is extremely popular - but we will have to sit down with them and draft out what we want in terms of how appeal processes will work, how they report back to us on how they are meeting that and making sure that applications are fitting the criteria that they are meant to.

4.14.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

May I ask the Minister what assurances he can give that in the future, if the system is not being seen to work ... I refer to Jersey Property Holdings and some of the accommodation they have developed, which is inaccessible, that as these arm's length companies, the arms seem to get longer and longer. What assurances, what checks will there be to ensure that this can be reviewed and perhaps reversed if it is not seen to be working and, as a Government, we maintain control?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

The Housing Gateway, as it stands, currently does both access to social rental housing and assisted ownership housing and there are specific criteria that people have to meet to be eligible for that. It is not like an open market sale, or anything like that. It is very specific and that is determined by what the Government, or this Assembly, decides it ought to be. Within any

agreement for Andium to provide that service, then, of course, there has to be provisions in it to have reviews about how it is going and I suppose, if worst comes to worst, it could be brought back to where it currently is, because we have that system as it currently is. I do not think that would be a desirable thing, because I do think it makes sense for those 2 to be separated, but if it did not work, well, of course, we would have to review it and see if there is an alternative arrangement.

4.14.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister assure Members that the provision of social rental housing will remain his priority for Andium and that we will not see a drift into Andium becoming predominantly a builder of houses for sale, rather than social rental?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Absolutely; my view is that we need to drastically increase the number of social rental homes that are available in Jersey, primarily to meet what we know is the need particularly of vulnerable, or people on low incomes, but also I would hope to have some sort of disruptive effect in the rest of the market, where the standard and accessibility to social housing is so good that it provides gold standards. That, of course, remains my priority, but there are, of course, many people in the Island who wish to own the home that they live in and I think that the model that Andium provides through their Homebuy scheme is a good model, because it has the safeguards in place to make sure that these homes remain for first-time buyers in perpetuity, when there are lots of historic examples in Jersey where that was not the case, where assistance went to schemes that only benefited the first people who got into those homes, not for future generations, which is not a good use of public money, in my view.

The Bailiff:

A final supplementary, Deputy Gardiner?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

No, thank you.