

2.7 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of the Minister for Housing regarding the possible introduction of a system of rent control following the introduction of Income Support:

Would the Minister inform Members whether he is considering introducing a system of rent control following the introduction of Income Support and, if so, would he support a system similar to that adopted by Guernsey and other jurisdictions?

Senator T.J. Le Main (The Minister for Housing):

The Housing Department will continue with a fair rent system up to and until the low income scheme and proposals are implemented. By then this Assembly of Members will have been able to input on the review of social housing which has been carried out by the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research. This will start in June and will go out as a Green Paper for consultation for all. Only then, when this is complete, will we be able to identify our rent structures and I suspect at this present time any rents will be at market rents and not at 10 or 20 per cent below as at present.

2.7.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I am very pleased to hear that the Members of the Assembly will be able to feed into this consultation which is going to be extremely significant for the future of Jersey. Will the considerations cover the private sector as well as the public sector?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir. What we are planning to carry out is a review of social housing which is the role of the Housing Department, housing trust subsidies and all relation to that but not involving itself in the private sector.

2.7.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I was going to direct this to the Minister of Social Security but I think it falls probably better with the Minister of Housing. We have heard a great deal about the new rent rebate system being paid to people of 5 years residency. Obviously these people, Sir, who will be living in unqualified accommodation... is there any intention from the Housing Department to vet any of this accommodation? Because we could be paying out hundreds of pounds for absolute squalor that we allow people to live in. I agree that we need to pay the money but who is going to vet the accommodation that the taxpayer is subsidising? To say that it is not going to be inflationary and done no research, Sir, I think the Minister needs to explain himself.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The issue is it will be over my dead body that we are going to start employing staff looking and checking our private unqualified accommodation. We have slimmed down, as required by this Assembly and by the Council of Ministers, our operation now to a point where it is so lean that it is causing us difficulties and having some time lags in processing applications and otherwise. I have no intention, Sir, of getting involved with further staffing in either rental deposits or other things in the private sector, in the unqualified sector. For the sake of clarity, I have some great concerns over this 5 year thing. I know that my fellow Minister will probably kick me to death afterwards but I have some grave concerns.

2.7.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Just a supplementary to that. I now have more concerns, Sir, because the Minister of Housing has just said over his dead body we go out and look at the places people are living in that the States are subsidising. So, Sir, I do have a concern and if he is not going to do the job could he suggest who does do it because it does need doing, Sir.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

That is not my role, Sir. The role that I have got at the present time up until the low income scheme comes into being is that eventually the Housing Department will be the provider of social housing. I would suspect, Sir, that in time with the issues of the housing laws being wrapped-up in the population migration policy that there will be probably no need for a Housing Minister in time to come. But that is a view that I perhaps hold not too deeply **[Laughter]** but I know there are Members in this Assembly that feel there should be a political head in social housing in Jersey, but at the end of the day, Sir, the role of the Housing Department will solely end up being a provider of social housing and will not be involved in housing laws and any of the other issues.

2.7.4 Deputy A. Breckon:

I wonder if the Minister could confirm that the Housing Department already inspect lodging houses and the registration and regulation of those which includes inspection, they already do that?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, Sir, but it has been causing us so much difficulty that that has been slimmed-down considerably. The issue is that eventually we would rather hope that there would be no need for inspecting registered, qualified lodging accommodation but I cannot see that happening for a while yet.

2.7.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The Minister expressed some grave concerns in relation to the 5-year law and it is not the first time that he has mentioned these grave concerns and looked to his Minister on the opposite bench to let him know that he was expecting a kick under the table. Can the Minister explain to us exactly what those grave concerns are? And, if not now, will he shortly bring to the Assembly those grave concerns so that we can understand them?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I think that in all fairness I have still got a fair amount of discussion to take place with the Social Security Minister, and I would not like to say anything further than that at the moment. We have arranged to meet to have further discussions but the issues are and my gut feeling is that should we go down the road of applying a housing component for those being in the Island for 60 months will, in my view, run away with public funding. I know that the Minister will say it is down to fairness, but at the end of the day I think there is a disparity between 5 years and 10 or 12 years. I believe that we could really be taken for a huge cost like the mobility allowances and other allowances that have gone out of control.