

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING
BY DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 27th FEBRUARY 2007

Question 1

Would the Minister –

- (a) explain why the Social Housing Property Plan envisages the sale of social rental stock when the proportion of such accommodation (States plus housing trusts) is already lower than the 17% figure in the United Kingdom?
- (b) give the current waiting period for 3-bed accommodation being notified to applicants by his department at a time when some of this housing is targeted for sale?

Answer

- (a) I would again preface this answer with that of my answer of 30th January 2007. In my statement to the Assembly in January 2007, I made it clear that I would be happy to discuss the Property Plan in detail with the relevant Scrutiny Panel. It seems to me that a Scrutiny Panel review of the Plan would be a more appropriate and effective forum for this sort of discussion, than a constant stream of questions in the Assembly. However-

Social housing figures from the UK are of little consequence in this context. It is akin to comparing 'apples and pears'. There is no single 'correct' level of social housing which could be applied to all communities, and no suggestion that the UK is a model of best practice which Jersey is obliged to imitate. It is a fact that the Island rate of owner-occupation is low, which is why the States last year requested the Housing Department to bring forward proposals to use social housing stock to progress a shared equity scheme, in order to encourage an increase in levels of home ownership in the Island.

The Housing Department has continually relaxed allocations criteria in order to let available stock. When this is coupled to a large proportion of social housing tenants not needing to claim rental subsidy; when these wealthier tenants far outnumber people on the Housing Waiting List; when people with incomes much higher than the average can access social housing and claim subsidy then, I believe there are good grounds for reasoning that the number of social housing units of accommodation exceeds the number of households in genuine social housing need. Therefore, in my view there is little relevance to the quoted 17% statistic.

- (b) The waiting period for a 3 bedroom home notified to applicants will differ significantly depending on the needs and preferences of individual applicants. For instance, an applicant who is willing to consider a variety of locations for a home would be advised that they could be housed almost immediately. However, an applicant with more specific requirements, understandably would need to wait for a longer period of time.

Question 2

Would the Minister set out the Department's current policy on carrying out repairs or installing much needed facilities for disability for tenants in rental arrears? If no such work is undertaken how does the department prevent hardship to tenants and a deterioration in the fabric of its housing stock?

Answer

The Department has an arrears policy which seeks to ensure that rent due is paid and that where arrears of rent accrue, these are recovered as quickly as possible having due regard for the individual circumstances of the tenant. This policy does allow the Department to withhold non-essential maintenance and other services, where tenants are refusing to pay rent regularly, failing to address their rent arrears or abide by agreements that they have entered into. Where tenants in arrears of rent are willing to work with the Department to manage the repayment of their debts, and agreements made to repay are abided by, then services will certainly not be withheld. It is a fact therefore that whether or not a tenant suffers any form of hardship through the withdrawal of any service is entirely in their control. The Department merely asks that a tenant in rent arrears addresses the issue and does not ignore the problem.

To prevent any deterioration of the stock, structural and wind and water tight repairs are undertaken even where unmanaged rent arrears are present to ensure that accommodation remains safe and habitable.