

3.9 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Housing regarding the issue of '(j)' category permits:

How does the Minister reconcile his decision to virtually suspend the issuing of (j) category permits with the Council of Ministers' policy of increasing the population by 430 individuals per annum as detailed in the Strategic Plan?

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

I am not sure what Ministerial Decision the Deputy refers to.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I am referring to the Strategic Plan which has at its very core the policy of increasing the population by up to 430 people per annum which has been put forward by the Council of Ministers. Surely the Minister has read that.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I have read it well but I cannot understand from the Deputy what decision that I have taken which refers to his question. I will say it for the second time.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Okay, perhaps it is a semantic issue then and it should not be the word "decision" but there was a statement released in the media roughly 3 weeks ago, so perhaps the Minister would like to take the opportunity to clarify his position.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I would suggest that the Deputy does not believe everything he reads in the media because I have taken no decision that refers to his question.

Deputy M. Tadier:

But would the Minister be so bold as to just clarify the position on (j) categories and the issuing of them?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Certainly, I would be very happy to do that. There is no question of my suspending the issue of (j) category permissions. I have simply outlined the established policy: (j) permissions are given to assist employers recruit and those that are training local people for jobs. They are not a means of rewarding promotions with existing employees in existing businesses.

3.9.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister confirm that in line with current policy the majority - I believe it is 60 per cent - of (j) categories being awarded now are permanent rather than 3 or 5 years?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, because that is a States policy for people that are in-post and the "Know Your Client"... and people that come in and the difficulty in recruiting highly qualified staff. As I say, many of them now are given permanent contracts because we have to make sure that the people we employ understand the regulatory demands of the Jersey Financial Services Commission, the "Know Your Client" all around the world and, as I say, the difficulty in being able to recruit highly skilled individuals because we are in the premier division of financial services. So that is the reason.

3.9.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister also accept that the granting of permanent (j) cats. will tend to increase the population and will further have an effect on the housing market?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, not at all. The issue is quite clear that there has been for many years a policy of issuing only 3 and 5-year (j) cat. licences and these were rolled over on a regular basis. What it means now is those people are on a permanent basis and there is no roll over. So that is not the case at all.

3.9.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the excellent work the Minister is doing which is an inspiration and an example to us all [**Laughter**], would he confirm that there has been a major problem with the public service in terms of (j) categories and is he taking a hard line in that area?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Only last week I refused in conjunction with the Migration Advisory Group but finally it is the Housing Minister's decision ... I turned down a request for a senior post in the public sector because I was dissatisfied with their training and their succession planning. I have turned that down and I will continue to do so. I hope the message goes out loud and clear, particularly to the public sector, to lead by example that they must have succession training. They must train local people. In many of the posts that have been granted over the years, the easy way out has been to get a (j) cat. and that is not the case any more.

3.9.4 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I would like to focus on the second half of the question. Would the Housing Minister care to inform the House where the extra 7,000 people that are envisaged in the Strategic Plan would go if that section of the plan is approved? Secondly, will there be a windfall tax in order to stop profiteering before any rezoning of the countryside?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, I cannot answer that question at the present time but if the Deputy would like to put it in writing I will respond and copy in all Members.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

A supplementary. I am very surprised that the Minister does not know where the 7,000 people are going to go. I do insist that he comment.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I did not say I did not know. I said I prefer to have it in writing so I have the proper facts before me before I respond.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

The half of the question of the windfall tax on fields that might have to be rezoned?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Any tax matters must be put forward to the Minister for Treasury and Resources, not the Minister for Housing.

3.9.5 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. Saviour:

Could the Minister confirm whether due to the economic downturn whether there has been an increase or decrease in (j) cat. applications recently?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Currently I am not concerned. There are less (j) cats. being granted in 2009 than 2008 but the Minister for Housing has a policy in conjunction with the Migration Advisory Group - which is Senator Routier and Connétable Norman - that we will support wholeheartedly any request for (j) cats. for highly professional people that are required by businesses right across the board; not only on finance but other businesses and including new businesses that may be beneficial to the Island who are going to be good employers, good taxpayers and other issues to enhance and maintain the very strong economy that we have.

3.9.6 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Can the Minister please inform the House how many (j) cats. in the last 12 months have been either refused or approved?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes. For 2008, approvals with a time limit of one to 5 years, approvals of 192; approvals without a time limit, 331 which makes a total approval of 523 and 58 refusals. In 2009 up to now, 15 approvals one to 5 years until 16th February; 16 without time limit, a total of 31.

3.9.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

First of all I would just like to thank the Minister for his clarification. I am happy to know that he is equally frustrated as I am with the shortcomings of the local media. Could he confirm whether his department is behind the Council of Ministers to increase the population and what possible strains on resources he can see on his department?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

My role at Housing is to have an input in maintaining a good, strong economy and also to make sure that the local housing basically gives quite a lot of protection to the local people in the Island. So although I am in favour of enhancing the economy with good business, new business that may be essential to the Island and to its economy, I am not in favour of rampant growth.